

The background of the cover is a photograph of a sunset over a lake. In the foreground, a boat is on the water with several people on board, their forms silhouetted against the bright orange and yellow light of the setting sun. The water reflects the light, creating a shimmering effect. In the background, a large, dark hill rises, and along its crest, a line of people is silhouetted against the sky, appearing to be walking or standing. The overall mood is peaceful and scenic.

City & sand

2026 Community Guide

Silver Lake • Mears • Hart



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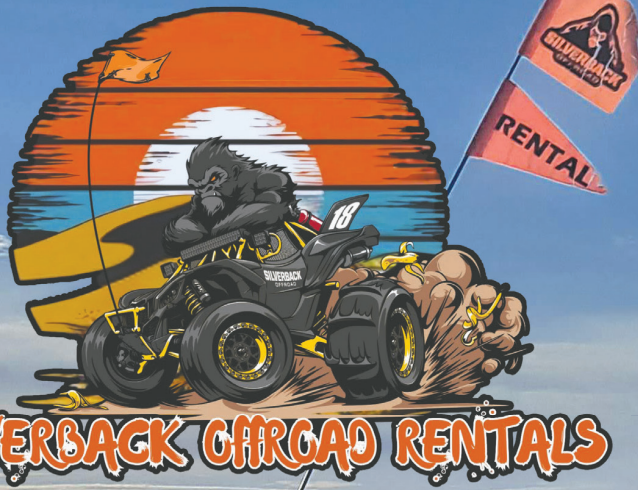
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Silver Lake Sand Dunes: WHERE ADVENTURE

published by

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Interim Publisher:
Paul Heidbreder

Sales:
Shelley Kovar, Monica Evans

Graphics:
Judy Lytle, Julie Eilers,
Madelyn Kerbyson

News: Lois Tomaszewski,
Shanna Avery, Alexis Settler,
Cristina Juska, Sean Chase,
Larry Launstein Jr., Kate Babel

Circulation:
Jerriann Steiger

Ludington Daily News
202 N Rath Ave.,
P.O. Box 340,
Ludington, MI 49431
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123 State Street,
PO Box 190,
Hart, MI 49420
(231) 873-5602
(231) 873-4775 fax

White Lake Beacon
PO Box 98
Whitehall, MI 49461
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At Silver Lake, the landscape doesn't sit still. Wind reshapes the dunes daily, carving ridgelines and softening slopes, creating a terrain that feels new with every visit. Tucked between Silver Lake and Lake Michigan, this stretch of shifting sand has become one of the most recognizable—and most dynamic—destinations along Michigan's west coast.

MEETS THE HORIZON



For many, the draw is the energy. Engines climb and descend the dunes in a steady rhythm, tracing lines across the sand in the only place in the region where private vehicles are permitted to operate in an open dune environment. Within the designated ORV area of Silver Lake State Park, riders are not confined to trails. Instead, they navigate a scramble zone—choosing their own routes, reading the terrain and responding to conditions that can change from one hour to the next.

That sense of freedom defines the experience. It's also what requires a level of awareness. Visibility over dune crests is limited, traffic patterns shift and conditions—from wind to sand firmness—can alter how vehicles handle. The result is an environment that is equal parts recreation and respect for the landscape.

But the dunes are not only for drivers.

Visitors gather along the edges of the ORV area to watch the movement—vehicles cresting, descending and weaving through the terrain. Others take a quieter approach, climbing the pedestrian dunes or walking in from the Lake Michigan shoreline, where the scale of the landscape becomes more apparent with each step. From the base of Little Sable Point Lighthouse, the dunes stretch outward in layered ridges, meeting the water in a way that feels both expansive and immediate.

For those who want the experience without driving, guided tours provide a different perspective. Mac Wood's Dune Rides has operated in the dunes for decades, offering narrated rides that move through the same terrain with the benefit of local knowledge and specialized vehicles.

Seasonally, the dunes take on an additional role as a gathering place. Events

such as the Blessing of the Duners mark the start of the riding season, while summer brings organized ride weekends, Jeep gatherings and community-focused events like Heroes on the Dunes. Fireworks over the dunes add another layer, turning the landscape into a nighttime backdrop that draws crowds from across the region. These events, often coordinated and promoted through the local chamber, reflect how deeply the dunes are tied to the area's identity and seasonal rhythm. By fall, the pace shifts. Crowds thin, the air cools and the dunes take on a quieter tone. The same terrain that buzzes in midsummer becomes more reflective—less about speed and more about space.

What remains constant is the sense of scale. Whether experienced from behind the wheel, on foot or from a distance, Silver Lake's dunes offer a landscape that is always moving—and an experience that changes with it.



PLAN YOUR VISIT: SILVER LAKE SAND DUNES

From high-energy dune riding to scenic overlooks and guided tours, Silver Lake offers multiple ways to experience one of Michigan's most distinctive landscapes. Planning ahead helps visitors match the experience to their comfort level and interests.

ORV RULES AT A GLANCE

- Season: April 1 – Oct. 31
- Hours: Generally 9 a.m. to evening (later in peak summer)
- Entry: Recreation Passport required
- ORV license and trail permit
- 10-foot safety flag
- Vehicles must meet sound limits (94 dB)

SAFETY

- Stay within marked ORV area
- Follow directional zones
- Helmets required where applicable
- ATVs limited to one rider

PROHIBITED

- Alcohol in ORV area
- Riding outside designated boundaries
- Most roadside travel outside posted ORV routes

PEAK SEASON

- Parking vouchers often required
- Entry may close when capacity is reached

EXPERIENCE THE DUNES WITHOUT AN ORV

Visitors do not need to drive to experience the dunes.

- Guided dune rides: Mac Wood's Dune Rides offers narrated tours through the dunes
- Pedestrian areas: Walkable dune sections within Silver Lake State Park

- Lighthouse & shoreline: Scenic viewpoints and quieter access along Lake Michigan

ACCESSIBILITY OPTIONS

The dunes can still be experienced by visitors with mobility considerations.

- Guided rides: Mac Wood's Dune Rides provides seated access into the dunes with staff assistance
- Accessible viewing areas: Parking and overlook points within Silver Lake State Park
- Lighthouse grounds & beach access: Offer stable surfaces and wide views

CONSIDERATIONS

- Loose sand limits mobility outside designated areas
- Weather and crowds can impact access

WHO OPERATES IN THE DUNES?

- Mac Wood's Dune Rides is the primary authorized operator providing guided rides within the ORV area. Other businesses may rent ORVs, but visitors operate independently and must follow all park regulations.

► QUICK TIP

Stop at the Silver Lake Sand Dunes Visitor Center on N. Comfort Drive in Hart for maps, conditions and current access information before heading to the dunes.



Did You Know?



Silver Lake, Mears, Hart and Golden Township

SILVER LAKE

- A lake shaped by glaciers and dunes. Silver Lake formed after the Wisconsin Glaciation, when retreating ice left low areas that filled with water. Wind later built a dune ridge that separated it from Lake Michigan.
- A perched coastal lake. The lake sits just inland from Lake Michigan, divided by dunes but still influenced by coastal processes.
- Mid-sized and accessible. At roughly 690 acres with about four miles of shoreline, it supports boating and fishing while remaining relatively compact.
- Relatively shallow. With a maximum depth of about 20 to 25 feet, the lake warms more quickly than deeper inland lakes.
- Frequently mixing waters. The lake mixes regularly rather than forming strong thermal layers, affecting oxygen levels and aquatic life.
- Productive ecosystem. The lake supports abundant plant growth and a diverse fishery.
- Groundwater-fed. Much of the lake's water supply comes from groundwater and tributaries such as Hunter Creek.
- A diverse fishery. Common species include largemouth bass, bluegill,

northern pike, walleye and yellow perch.

- Water levels are regulated. The lake operates under legally established levels with local oversight.
- Long-established shoreline development. Much of the lakefront is lined with cottages and seasonal homes, reflecting decades of recreational use.

MEARS

- Gateway to the lakeshore. Mears serves as a primary access point for visitors to Silver Lake and nearby Lake Michigan beaches.
- Home to Little Sable Point Lighthouse. Built in 1874, the lighthouse is a well-known landmark along this stretch of Lake Michigan.
- Highly seasonal community. Activity and population increase significantly during the summer tourism season.
- Rooted in agriculture. Surrounding farmland produces apples, asparagus and other crops central to the local economy.
- Longstanding tourism base. Visitor-oriented businesses have operated in the area for generations.

HART

- County seat of Oceana County.

Hart serves as the governmental and commercial hub for the region.

- Known for asparagus production. The area's agricultural identity is highlighted annually during the National Asparagus Festival.
- Home to John Gurney Park. The park overlooking Hart Lake is a central community gathering space dating to the early 20th century.
- Tin Man-inspired sculpture reflects the city's name. A downtown sculpture resembling the Tin Man from the Wizard of Oz — with a red heart — serves as a visual play on "Hart" and is a recognizable local landmark.
- Home of the Oceana County Fair. The fairgrounds host one of the region's longstanding annual events.
- Hart Lake anchors the city. The inland lake and surrounding parkland provide a focal point for recreation within the community.

GOLDEN TOWNSHIP (SILVER LAKE AREA)

- The township surrounding Silver Lake. Much of the lake shoreline and surrounding development lies within Golden Township.
- About 1,600 year-round residents. The permanent population is mod-

est but expands significantly during peak tourism months.

- Established in 1866. The township was formed as settlement spread through Oceana County.
- Mixed land use. The area includes year-round homes, seasonal cottages, campgrounds and resort-style properties.
- No traditional downtown. Businesses are spread along key corridors rather than centered in a single district.
- Infrastructure shaped by seasonality. Roads and services are designed to accommodate large summer populations.
- Regional reliance. Residents and visitors depend on nearby Mears for services and Hart for government, schools and commerce.

REGIONAL NOTES

- Four communities, one destination. Visitors move between Silver Lake, Golden Township, Mears and Hart for lodging, recreation and services.
- Agriculture and tourism intersect. Active farmland exists alongside a strong seasonal visitor economy.
- Seasonal contrast is significant. Summer brings peak activity; winter is quieter.

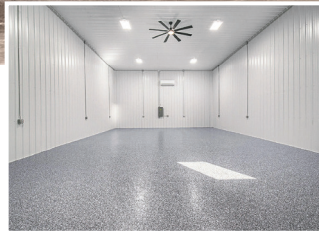
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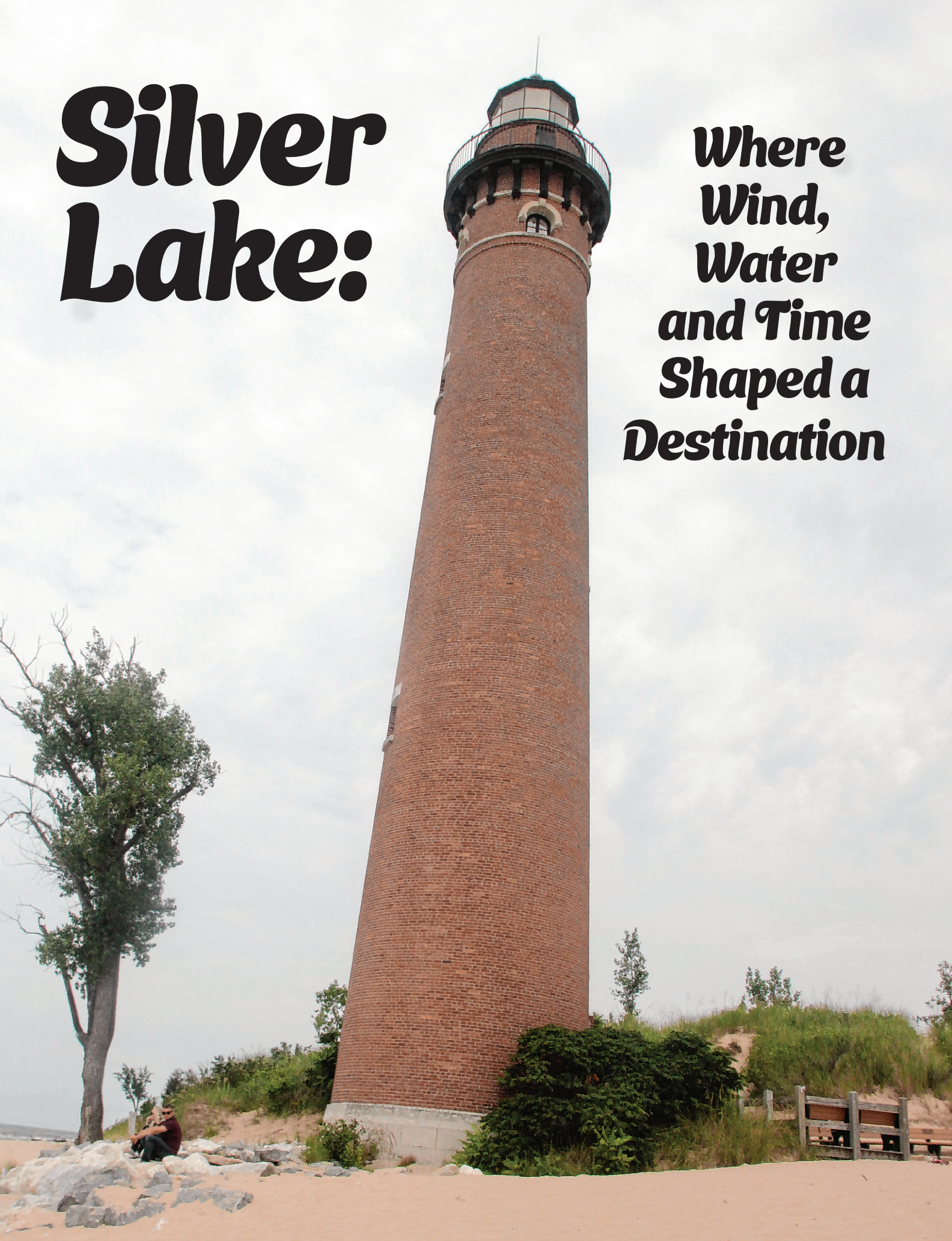
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Along the eastern edge of Lake Michigan, where shifting dunes rise between open water and a quiet inland lake, Silver Lake tells a story that stretches far beyond its reputation as a summer playground. It is a place shaped first by nature, then by necessity, and ultimately by generations of people drawn to its uncommon landscape.

Silver Lake itself is the product of long-term geological forces. Following the last Ice Age, glaciers from the Wisconsin Glaciation retreated roughly 10,000 to 12,000 years ago, leaving behind depressions in the landscape and vast deposits of sand and sediment. Meltwater filled these low-lying areas, forming early inland lakes. Over time, strong prevailing winds off Lake Michigan pushed sand inland, gradually building a dune ridge along the shoreline. That ridge eventually cut off a portion of water from Lake Michigan, isolating it and forming what is now Silver Lake.

The result is what geologists describe as a perched coastal lake—a body of water sitting just inland from a Great Lake, separated by dunes but still shaped

by the same natural systems. Even today, the landscape remains dynamic: wind continues to move the dunes, groundwater feeds the lake, and sediment slowly alters its shoreline and depth.

Long before cottages lined the shoreline or vehicles traced paths across the sand, the area that would become Silver Lake was part of the seasonal lifeways of the Odawa (Ottawa) people. The lake, forests and dunes offered fish, game and travel corridors along the Lake Michigan coast. The terrain itself—defined by water, sand and movement—shaped how people lived here long before it became a destination.

By the mid-1800s, that same landscape began to draw a different kind of attention. As Oceana County was organized and settled, dense stands of pine made the area part of Michigan's booming lumber economy. Logging camps and small settlements emerged, and waterways became working corridors, moving timber out and supplies in. The work was demanding and often temporary, but it established the first lasting communities in places like Mears and Hart.

When the timber was gone, the land—and the people connected to it—adapted again. Farming took root in some areas, but it was the shoreline that hinted at a different future. By the early 20th century, visitors began arriving not to extract resources, but to experience them. Families built modest cottages. Resorts and campgrounds appeared. The same dunes that once stood as obstacles became attractions, and the lake became a place for swimming, boating and summer gatherings.

A defining symbol of that transition stands at the water's edge: Little Sable Point Lighthouse. Completed in 1874, its brick tower has guided ships along Lake Michigan for more than a century. Today, it also serves as a visual anchor between the area's maritime past and its tourism-driven present.

By the mid-20th century, Silver Lake's identity took on a new dimension—one that would set it apart from nearly every other shoreline community in the Midwest. Visitors began driving across the dunes, first informally and then as a recognized activity. What started as experimentation grew into a defining feature of the

region, eventually formalized within Silver Lake State Park.

Today, the park's ORV area is one of the only places in the country where vehicles can legally traverse open dunes along a Great Lake. The sight of jeeps and off-road vehicles climbing sandy ridges has become as iconic as the lighthouse itself, drawing thousands of visitors each year and shaping a local economy built around recreation, rentals and seasonal tourism.

Despite that energy, the deeper rhythm of Silver Lake remains tied to its natural origins. The dunes still shift. The shoreline still changes. And beyond the busiest months, the same landscape that once supported logging crews and Indigenous communities returns to a quieter state—wind moving across open sand, water stretching toward the horizon.

Silver Lake's history is not defined by a single era, but by its ability to evolve without losing the elements that made it distinct in the first place. It is a place where industry gave way to recreation, where geography dictated opportunity—and where the forces that created it are still at work today.

Names & Origins – Silver Lake, Mears and Hart

The place names across the Silver Lake area reflect a mix of descriptive geography and individuals tied to early settlement, based on widely cited historical accounts and regional references.

SILVER LAKE

“Silver Lake” is a descriptive name, drawn from the lake’s reflective appearance under certain light conditions. This follows common 19th-century naming patterns based on visible landscape features. Federal records such as the Geographic Names Information System confirm the official name, though not the origin.

MEARS

Mears was established in 1873 and is named for Charles Mears, a lumber entrepreneur whose operations helped drive early development along the Lake Michigan shoreline. This attribution is consistently supported in historical summaries and regional references and is considered well documented.

HART

The city of Hart, county seat of Oceana County, is widely associated with early settler Joseph Hart. The attribution appears in county histories and local accounts but lacks a single definitive primary-source citation. As a result, it is best framed as a traditional or widely accepted naming origin rather than a conclusively documented one.



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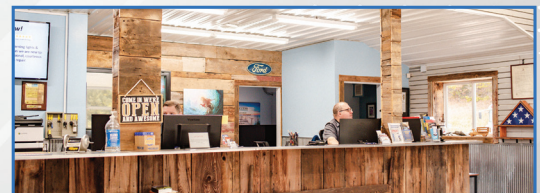
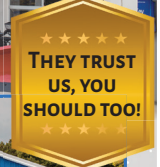
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EVENTS CALENDAR *Silver Lake/Oceana Area*

RECURRING EVENTS:
PENTWATERS FARMERS MARKET (JUNE-SEPTEMBER) – Mondays & Thursdays – 10 a.m. - 1 p.m., Village Green
NEW ERA FARMERS MARKET (June-September) – 2nd + 4th Tuesday – 4 - 7 p.m., New Era Christian Reformed Church

PENTWATER CIVIC BAND CONCERTS – Thursdays (June 25 - August 27) – 7:30 - 8:30 p.m., Village Green

MAY 15

MAC WOODS DUNE RIDES Opening Day, 629 N. 18th Ave.,

Mears
LEWIS ADVENTURE FARM AND Zoo Opening Day, 4180 M-20, New Era
THRIFT AND GIFT CRAWL, downtown Hart

MAY 16

THRIFT AND GIFT CRAWL, downtown Hart

MAY 17

BIDS AND SIPS FOR Scholarships and more, 2 - 5 p.m., Park Place, 750 N. Rush St., Pentwater

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MAY 25
MEMORIAL DAY PARADE, 10 -
 11 a.m., downtown Pentwater

MAY 28 - 31
10TH ANNUAL SILVER LAKE
 Sand Dunes Jeep Invasion, 8501
 Silver Lake Rd., Mears

JUNE 7
START OF SUMMER PARTY, 5 - 7

p.m., Village Green, 327 S. Hancock St., Pentwater

JUNE 12
NATIONAL ASPARAGUS FESTIVAL KICKOFF Party, 7:30 p.m., Oceana County Fairgrounds, 1025 S. State St., Hart

JUNE 13
PENTWATER GARAGE SALES, 8
 a.m. - 5 p.m., Pentwater Area

NATIONAL ASPARAGUS FESTIVAL, HART
HART HERITAGE CAR SHOW, 10
 a.m. - 3 p.m., Hart Historic District, 570 Lincoln St., Hart

ASPARAGUS FESTIVAL JOAN GLOVER Royal Parade, 2 p.m., State Street, Hart

FREE FISHING, FREE ORV Weekend & Free State Park Admission

JUNE 14
NATIONAL ASPARAGUS FESTIVAL, HART
FREE FISHING, FREE ORV Weekend & Free State Park Admission

JUNE 17
DAVE MARTIN - NIGHT at the Lights Concert Series, 7 p.m., Little Sable Point Lighthouse, 287 N. Lighthouse Dr., Mears

JUNE 20
SPRING FEST ARTS AND Crafts Show, 10 a.m. - 5 p.m., Village Green, 231 S. Hancock St., Pentwater

MEARS MUSEUM AND HISTORICAL Park opens, Mears

JUNE 21
SPRING FEST ARTS AND Crafts Show, 10 a.m. - 3 p.m., Village Green, 231 S. Hancock St., Pentwater

JUNE 25
MUSIC ON THE COMMONS, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m., Hart Historic District, Lincoln St., Hart

JUNE 27
TACOS AND TREK 2026, 11:30
 a.m. - 1:30 p.m., Pentwater Hart Trail, 231 S. Hancock St., Pentwater

HART COMMUNITY GARAGE SALE, Hart area

COUNTRY DAIRY ICE CREAM Social, 3476 S. 80th Ave., New Era

JULY 2
HART SPARKS FIREWORKS, 6 - 11 p.m., Hart Commons, 49 S. State St., Hart

JULY 3
PENTWATER FIREWORKS, 8 - 10:30 p.m., Charles Mears State Park, 400 W. Lowell St., Pentwater

JULY 4
THUNDER OVER THE DUNES Fireworks, 10:30 - 11 p.m., Silver Lake Sand Dunes, 8960 W. Fox Rd., Mears

JULY FOURTH YOUTH PARADE, 9:45 - 10:45 a.m., downtown Pentwater

LEWIS FARMS PRESENTS: RED, White and Blue Bash, 9 a.m., Lewis Adventure Farm and Zoo, 4180 W. M-20, New Era

JULY 5
STONY LAKES SPARKLER 5K, 8 a.m., Stony Lake Inn, 4722 S. Scenic Dr., Shelby

THE LAKE EFFECT SUMMER Art Show, 10:30 a.m. - 4 p.m., 4189 Scenic Dr., Shelby

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JULY 9

MUSIC ON THE COMMONS, 6:30
- 8:30 p.m., Hart Historic District,
Lincoln St., Hart

JULY 10

SHELBY CARVEPRIZE FESTIVAL, SHELBY GOLDEN SANDS GLOW BASH, 8 p.m., Golden Sands Golf and Bucket Bar, 2501 Wilson Rd., Silver Lake

JULY 11

61ST ANNUAL PENTWATER FINE Arts and Craft Fair, 9 a.m. - 5 p.m., Village Green, 327 S. Hancock St., Pentwater
SHELBY CARVEPRIZE FESTIVAL, SHELBY CHRISTMAS IN JULY: MARKER'S Market, 9 a.m. - 4 p.m., Up North Garden Center, 3960 W. Monroe Rd., Hart
GOLDEN SANDS GLOW BASH, 8 p.m., Golden Sands Golf and Bucket Bar, 2501 Wilson Rd., Silver Lake

LITTLE MERMAID SPLISH SPLASH, 11 a.m. - 3:30 p.m., Lewis Adventure Farm and Zoo, 4180 W. M-20, New Era

JULY 12

ST. JOSEPH AND ST. Vincent 75th Annual Ox Roast and Homecoming, 11:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m., 2380 W. Jackson Rd., Hart

JULY 16

MUSIC ON THE COMMONS, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m., Hart Historic District, Lincoln St., Hart

JULY 17 - 18

HEROES ON THE DUNES, Val Du Lakes Bar and Grill Campground, 1573 N. Wilson Rd., Mears

JULY 23

MUSIC ON THE COMMONS, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m., Hart Historic District, Lincoln St., Hart

JULY 25

MEARS CRAFT SHOW, 9 a.m. - 3 p.m., Johnson Square, 5645-5671 W Fox Rd, Mears

JULY 29

ERIC MICHAELS AND CHRIS Kennedy - Night at the Lights Concert Series, 7 p.m., Little Sable Point Lighthouse, 287 N. Lighthouse Dr., Mears

JULY 30

MUSIC ON THE COMMONS, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m., Hart Historic District, Lincoln St., Hart

JULY 31

THE FORMERS - HART Historic District Free Friday Night Concert Series, 7 - 8:30 p.m., 570 Lincoln St., Hart

AUGUST 1

C.O.V.E. BENEFIT BEACH WALK/RUN, 8:30 a.m. - 12 p.m., Charles

Mears State Park, 400 W. Lowell St., Pentwater

AUGUST 2

ST. JAMES CHICKEN DINNER, 11:30 a.m. - 1 p.m., St. James Episcopal Church, 82 S. Wythe St., Pentwater

AUGUST 6

MUSIC ON THE COMMONS, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m., Hart Historic District, Lincoln St., Hart

AUGUST 7 - 8

BRONCO TAKEOVER, GOLDEN SANDS Golf and Bucket Bar, 2501 Wilson Rd., Silver Lake

AUGUST 13

MUSIC ON THE COMMONS, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m., Hart Historic District, Lincoln St., Hart



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AUGUST 13 - 16

HOMECOMING CELEBRATION, DOWNTOWN PENTWATER

AUGUST 12

MEDICINE MEN - NIGHT at the Lights Concert Series, 7 - 8 p.m., Little Sable Point Lighthouse, 287 N. Lighthouse Dr., Pentwater

AUGUST 15

FREE ORV WEEKEND SHELBY FRUIT FESTIVAL, 12 - 4 p.m., Shelby Township Park, 4101 Buchanan Rd., Shelby

AUGUST 16

FREE ORV WEEKEND

AUGUST 20

MUSIC ON THE COMMONS, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m., Hart Historic District, Lincoln St., Hart

AUGUST 21

PENTWATER SIDEWALK SALES, DOWNTOWN Pentwater

AUGUST 22

7TH ANNUAL OLD SCHOOL Buggy Meet, 12 - 4 p.m., Silver Lake Sand Dunes, 1765 N Lakeview Dr, Mears

PENTWATER SIDEWALK SALES, DOWNTOWN Pentwater

AUGUST 25 - 29

OCEANA COUNTY FAIR, 1025 S. State St., Hart

AUGUST 27

MUSIC ON THE COMMONS, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m., Hart Historic District, Lincoln St., Hart

SEPTEMBER 11 - 12

23RD ANNUAL APPLE AND BBQ Festival, Golden Township Park at Silver Lake Sand Dunes, 8501 Silver Lake Rd., Mears

SEPTEMBER 18 - 19

LUMINOUS TRAIL - A Glow in the Park, 8 - 10:30 p.m., Charles Mears State Park, 400 W. Lowell St., Pentwater

SEPTEMBER 19

NEW ERA FALL FESTIVAL, 9 a.m. - 3 p.m., New Era
PRINCESS AND SUPERHERO SPECTACULAR, 12 - 4 p.m., Lewis Adventure Farm and Zoo, 4180 W. M-20, New Era

SEPTEMBER 25

HARVEST DAY FESTIVAL, 10 a.m. - 1 p.m., Pentwater

SEPTEMBER 26

FALL FEST ARTS AND Crafts Show, 10 a.m. - 5 p.m., Village Green, 231 Hancock St., Pentwater
GOLDEN SANDS STEINFEST, GOLDEN Sands Golf and Bucket Bar, 2501 N. Wilson Rd., Mears

SEPTEMBER 27

FALL FEST ARTS AND Crafts Show, 10 a.m. - 3 p.m., Village Green, 231 S. Hancock St., Pentwater

LITTLE SABLE LIGHTHOUSE CLOSES for the season

SEPTEMBER 30


MAC WOODS DUNE RIDES Closes

OCTOBER 2

GOLDEN FAIR PARADE, DOWNTOWN Mears

OCTOBER 3

THE RIDE H.O.M.E - Rail Trail Bike Event, 9 a.m., 49 State St., Hart
ART WALK, 11 A.M. - 2 p.m., downtown Hart
SANDERSON SISTERS SPOOK-TACULAR, 12 - 4 p.m., Lewis Adventure Farm and Zoo, 4180 W. M-20, New Era




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OCTOBER 4

SANDERSON SISTERS SPOOK-TACULAR, 12 - 4 p.m., Lewis Adventure Farm and Zoo, 4180 W. M-20, New Era

OCTOBER 10

OKTOBERFEST, DOWNTOWN PENTWATER
STOUT STUMBLE 5K WALK and Run, 10 a.m., Pentwater
OKTOBERFEST CLASSIC CAR AND Hot Rod Show, 10 a.m. - 5 p.m., downtown Pentwater

OCTOBER 24

SPOOKTACULAR, 12 P.M., VIL-LAGE Green, 231 Hancock St., Pentwater

OCTOBER 31

PENTWATER TRICK OR TREAT-ING, 5 - 7 p.m., Pentwater Village

NOVEMBER 1 - 30

SHORELINE HORSEBACK RIDING ON the dunes, Silver Lake Sand Dunes State Park, 8960 W. Fox Rd., Mears

NOVEMBER 7

VETERANS DAY 5K, GETTY Park, 62 E. State St., Shelby
VETERANS DAY PARADE, DOWN-TOWN Hart

NOVEMBER 27

HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS Lighted Parade and Tree Lighting, downtown Hart

NOVEMBER 28

3RD ANNUAL MERRY MARKET, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m., Up North Garden Center, 3960 W. Monroe Rd., Hart
SANTA ON THE GREEN, 5 p.m., Village Green, 231 Hancock St., Pentwater
HART AND PENTWATER SMALL Business Saturday



DECEMBER 15

FAT BIKING ON THE dunes starts, Silver Lake Sand Dunes, 8960 W. Fox Rd., Mears

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Where Apple & BBQ are celebrated

Two-day event blends food, music, community traditions and fall flavors

APPLE & BBQ FESTIVAL SIGNALS THE SHIFT TO FALL

One of the defining events of the season in Silver Lake is the annual Apple & BBQ Festival, a two-day celebration that blends harvest traditions with the area's signature festival atmosphere.

In 2026, the festival is scheduled for **Friday, Sept. 11 (2–9 p.m.)** and **Saturday, Sept. 12 (10 a.m.–8 p.m.)**, held at Golden Township Park near the Silver Lake Sand Dunes.

The event is free to attend, with no admission or parking fee, according to festival information.

The event features food vendors, a large craft show, live entertainment and family activities. The Silver Lake Sand Dunes Area Chamber of Commerce describes it as a two-day fall festival highlighting local food, crafts and entertainment.

Food remains central to the experience. According to festival information, nearly 20 food trucks line the park, offering barbecue, apple-based desserts and a variety of festival favorites, along with beer, wine and other beverages served throughout the weekend.

A GROWING TRADITION

The Apple & BBQ Festival marks its 23rd year in 2026, reflecting its evolution into one of Oceana County's established annual events.

According to festival organizers, proceeds from the event have supported community projects, including more than \$20,000 in donations to Golden Township Park at the Silver Lake Sand Dunes. Organizers say this year's charitable efforts will benefit the Crystal Valley Care Fund and United Way of the Lakeshore.

MORE THAN A FESTIVAL

Today, the event serves as a seasonal pivot point, marking the transition from Silver Lake's high-energy summer tourism to a slower, harvest-focused fall rhythm.

Set against the backdrop of the dunes and shoreline, the festival reinforces the area's identity as a destination that extends beyond peak summer months, offering visitors a reason to return as the season changes.

PLAN YOUR VISIT

Location

Golden Township Park, 8501 Silver Lake Road in Mears, near the Silver Lake Sand Dunes in Silver Lake.

Dates & times

Friday, Sept. 11 (2–9 p.m.)
Saturday, Sept. 12 (10 a.m.–8 p.m.)

Admission

Free admission and parking.

Schedule & details

For the most up-to-date entertainment schedule, event details and registration information, visit applebbqfestival.com or follow the festival on Facebook.

Nearby events

Some festival activities — including the Apple A Day 5K and the Chicken Shack Classic Auto & ORV Show — take place at nearby locations in the Silver Lake and Mears area.

A featured event presented by the Hart Athletic Boosters, showcasing Jeeps, cars, trucks and off-road vehicles in a judged competition with multiple award categories.

Homemade Apple Pie Contest

Saturday, Sept. 12

A festival tradition featuring two age-based divisions: youth (ages 7–13) and adult (ages 14 and up). Entries are judged on appearance, taste and consistency, with prizes awarded to top finishers.

Apple A Day 5K

Saturday, Sept. 12

A non-timed morning run/walk beginning at 9 a.m. near Mac Wood's Dune Rides, offering an active start to the festival day.

Live Music & Demonstrations

Live performances and hands-on demonstrations — such as chainsaw carving and blacksmithing — as featured in previous years, are typically part of the weekend lineup.

Family Activities

Kid-friendly attractions — including face painting, petting zoos and pony rides — as featured in previous years, help create a family-friendly environment.

Craft Show & Vendors

According to festival information, the craft show features more than 140 vendors set along a closed roadway near the festival grounds, offering handcrafted goods, baked items and locally grown products.



FESTIVAL HIGHLIGHTS

Apple & BBQ Festival

A two-day fall festival featuring food vendors, craft booths, live entertainment, a beer and wine tent and family activities. According to festival information, nearly 20 food trucks line the park offering barbecue, apple desserts and a variety of festival foods.

Chicken Shack Classic Auto & ORV Show

Saturday, Sept. 12



By the numbers

- 23rd year of the festival in 2026
- Nearly 20 food trucks
- 140+ craft and vendor booths
- 2 days of events and activities
- \$20,000+ donated to Golden Township Park





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