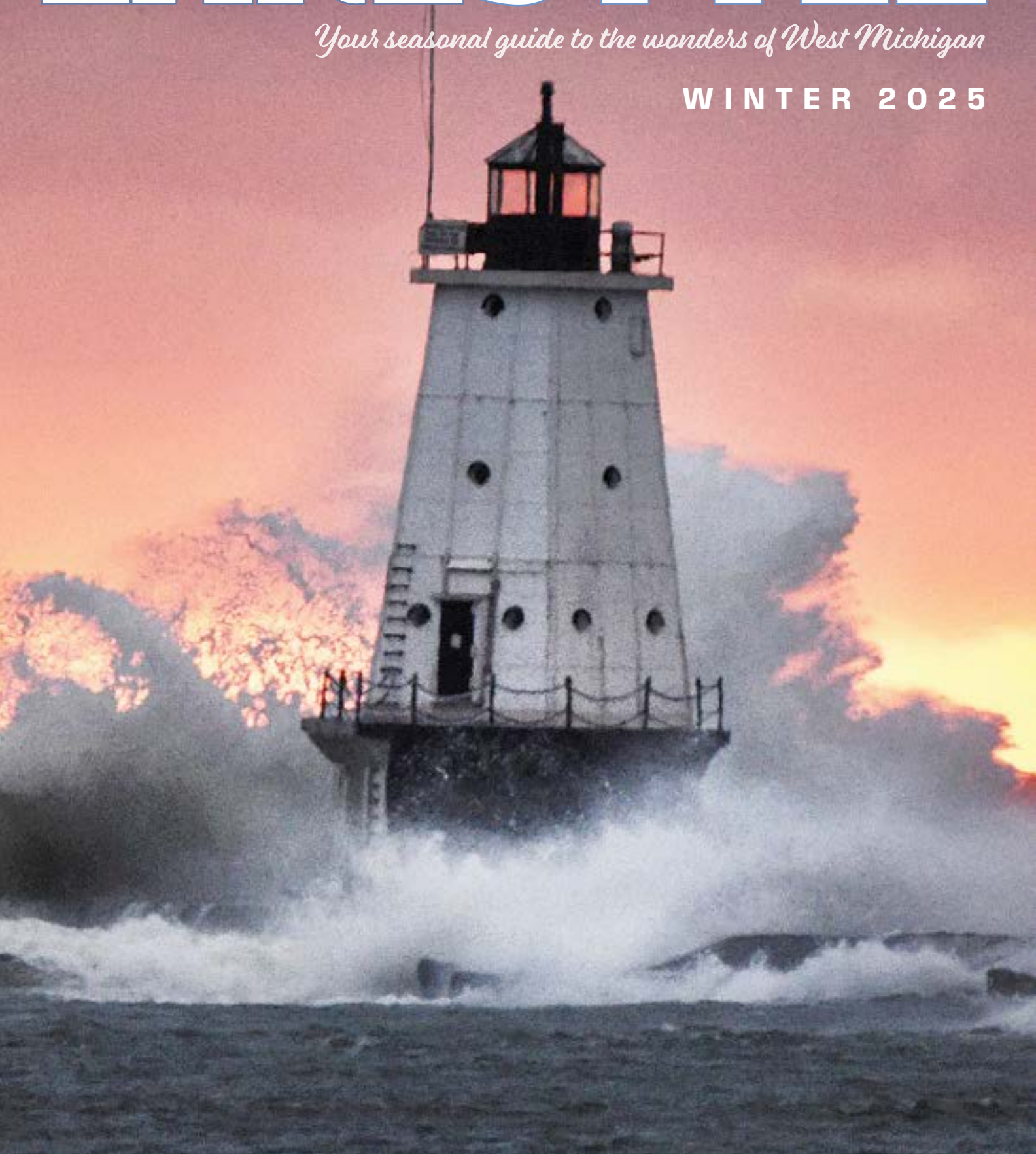


# LAKESTYLE

*Your seasonal guide to the wonders of West Michigan*

WINTER 2025





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*Cover photo by*  
**STEVE BEGNOCHE**

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# TINSELED TRADITIONS

*LakeStyle area features many  
yuletide and wintertime festivals*

Large crowd  
follows big tree  
down River Street  
in Manistee during  
the Sleighbell  
parade

*By DAVID L. BARBER  
Photos by JEANNE BARBER*



Traditions help us maintain our balance. As the kind-hearted Tevye sang in Fiddler and the Roof, “Because of our traditions, we’ve kept our balance for many, many years.”

What might otherwise have

roof.”

Traditions help us maintain our balance, alright, especially at Christmastime, and Wintertime, when they become tinseled and teased with hot cocoa, hot rum and family-friendly festivals and parades, and when

pause, out jumps good ole’ Santa Claus; down through the chimney with lots of toys, all for the little ones’ Christmas joys.”

Whether you’re a fiddler, or the most beloved toymaker of all time, you gotta’ love when they’re driven by tradition.

And along the lakeshore and the LakeStyle area, one of the most beloved Christmastime festivals of all – one that celebrates the tradition of the Victorian Era – is the annual Manistee’s Victorian Sleighbell Parade and Old Christmas Weekend that is always held the first weekend in December, meaning this year it will be held December 4-7.

By tradition, that parade features horse-drawn sleighs and wagons – no motorized vehicles are allowed.

By tradition, chestnuts are roasted over open fires, and offered free-of-charge to parade-goers.

By tradition, parade participants and even those who stand among the crowd dress in Victorian Era costumes.

By tradition, the event will feature its popular Festival of the Trees.

And by tradition, crowds that typically number in the thousands fall in behind a 30-foot Christmas tree that is pulled by a team of horses from the start of the parade to its finish – right through the middle of downtown Manistee – to where they then stand and sing carols, and

watch fireworks.

This year’s festival will feature a Victorian Christmas Concert will be held on Thursday, Dec. 4, at the First Congregational Church (time TBA); and a Cookie Crawl the following day on Friday, Dec. 5, where visitors can purchase a cookie collection box and then stop by local businesses to gather specially designed and crafted signature cookies (only 100 cookie boxes will be sold by freewill donation).

But by tradition, there is so much more to this weekend event and for more information, go to [manisteesleighbellparade.com](http://manisteesleighbellparade.com)

There are many other wintertime festivals and celebrations planned for the LakeStyle area, of few of which include:

In the peaceful hamlet of Hart in Oceana County, a traditional “Home for the Holidays” celebration on Nov. 28.

The day-long event will feature a lighted parade that will begin at the Hart Public Schools at 6:30 p.m.; and a visit with Santa Claus at the Hart Commons.

Pre- and post-parade guests will be able to warm up with hot cocoa that will be available at the Lakeside Rehab and Fitness Center, at 39 State St.

Also in Oceana County, the Pentwater Christmas in the Village festivities will be held on weekends from Thanksgiving to New Year’s Day.

During those weekends, Pentwater’s shops, art galleries and restaurants will be decorated in traditional holiday themes, and refreshments and in-store specials will be offered in festival-friendly ways.

For more information contact the Pentwater Chamber of Commerce at (231) 869-4150, or at [pentwater.org](http://pentwater.org)

In the quaint Manistee County village of Bear Lake on the county’s north side,

nighttime will once again sparkle – quite literally – with its tradition Sparkle in the Park, which runs Thanksgiving Weekend through New Year’s Eve (5 to 10 p.m.) and that has grown to draw visitors from all across the state.



Manistee’s Festival of the Trees

Jeanne Barber photo

happened to Tevye and the good people of Anatevka?

“Without our traditions,” he sang, “our lives would be as shaky as, as a fiddler on the

another merry music maker does his best to maintain his balance on our roofs.

Because as another song goes, “Up on the rooftop reindeer



Jeanne Barber photo





Sponsored by the Bear Lake Promoters and the Bear Lake Village Council, Sparkle in the Park features about 50 colorfully-lit displays in Hopkins Park, along the Bear Lake lakeshore, displays that include angels, Santa Claus and his reindeer, Christmas trees, snowmen, a salute to troops, various animals and more.

Opening night events will

include tailgate chili, coffee, hot chocolate and cookies from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., and a visit with Santa and Mrs. Claus at the pavilion from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m.

For more information contact the Village of Bear Lake at (231) 342-7285, or go to [facebook.com/sparklein-thepark](https://facebook.com/sparklein-thepark)

In Mason County, the Pure Ludington Brrrewfest will be held Jan. 31.

During the course of the

event, some 20 or so breweries and wineries will offer visitors a taste of beers, wines, ciders and meads, from all across the state. The Brrrewfest will run from 1 to 6 p.m., and will be held at Legacy Plaza on north James Street in Ludington.

Pre-sale tickets are available for purchase on-line, and include seven drink tokens (each token is good for five ounces of beer or cider.) Additional tokens also can be purchased. Music will be provided by DJ Adam Knudsen, and food will be available from local food trucks.

For more information contact the event organizer the Ludington Area Convention and Visitors Bureau at (231) 845-5430, or go to [ludington.org](http://ludington.org).

Oh, and just so you know, Ludington is also home to one of the very best New Year's Eve ball drops to be found anywhere in the U.S.

Also, to learn more about the tinsel traditions that abound in Muskegon County – and there are many – go to [visit-muskegon.org](http://visit-muskegon.org)

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# Stay Healthy and Happy this WINTER

## BY CRISTINA JUSKA

Shoreline Media Staff Writer

Winter in West Michigan brings its share of challenges — cold temperatures, snow, icy roads and more. Add to that the seasonal health concerns: cold and flu, COVID-19, RSV and seasonal depression.

Here are expert-backed strategies to help you stay well and boost your mood through the colder months.

## GET VACCINATED

According to Dr. Andrew Jameson, specialty medical director at Trinity Health Medical Group and section chief of infectious diseases, the best way to protect yourself this winter is by getting vaccinated. Immunizations can prevent or reduce the severity of several illnesses:

- **COVID-19:** Vaccines are currently approved for individuals age 65 and older, and for younger people with certain underlying medical conditions or behaviors that increase their risk of severe illness.

- **Influenza:** “Last winter was one of the worst flu seasons in years,” Jameson said. In 2024, flu-related

hospitalizations in Michigan surpassed those for COVID-19 for the first time since the pandemic. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends annual flu shots for everyone age 6 months and older, especially those at higher risk of complications.

- **Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV):** RSV is one of the most common respiratory illnesses. Symptoms include coughing, wheezing, runny nose, fever, congestion and loss of appetite. While most cases are mild, adults 75 and older, infants, and

people with compromised immune systems or chronic conditions face a higher risk of serious illness or death. The RSV vaccine is a one-time shot that significantly reduces the risk of hospitalization. The CDC recommends it for adults 75 and older, and for those 50 and older who are at higher risk. To protect infants, the CDC advises either the maternal RSV vaccine during weeks 32–36 of pregnancy or a long-acting antibody given after birth.

District Health Department #10 offers vaccines for babies, children,

teens and adults. Most insurance plans are accepted, and a sliding-fee scale is available for those facing financial hardship. Many local pharmacies also administer vaccines.

## STOP THE SPREAD

In addition to vaccination, practicing good hygiene and common sense can help prevent illness.

“Viruses spread when infected people cough or sneeze, releasing droplets that linger in the air or on surfaces,” Jameson said. “Frequent handwashing with soap and water, disinfecting high-touch surfaces like doorknobs, and maintaining good ventilation indoors can help reduce transmission. Avoid close contact with people show-

ing respiratory symptoms. And wearing a mask not only protects you — it protects others if you’re sick.”

## EAT YOUR VEGGIES

Nutrition plays a key role in immune health year-round. Eating nutrient-rich foods, staying hydrated, and considering supplements like vitamins C and D can help. Regular exercise and quality sleep also support

your immune system.

According to HomemadeMastery.com, seasonal vegetables are especially beneficial in winter. Try cabbage, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, onions, sweet potatoes, kale, beets, carrots, lettuce, radishes and spinach. Look online for hearty recipes like soups and stews. One-pot meals and slow-cooker dishes make it easier to eat well on busy days.

## IMPROVE YOUR MOOD

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is a type of depression that typically occurs in fall and winter. According to Harvard Health, it’s linked to reduced daylight and seasonal changes. Symptoms often improve with the arrival of





spring.

SAD is more than just the “winter blues.” It’s a clinically recognized mood disorder that affects how a person feels, thinks and behaves. Common symptoms include persistent sadness, low energy, excessive sleep and social withdrawal.

- Ways to manage SAD include:
- **Light therapy:** Use a light therapy box for 20–30 minutes daily to mimic sunlight and boost mood.
  - **Get outside:** Even brief exposure to natural light helps regulate your circadian rhythm.
  - **Stay connected:** Isolation can worsen symptoms, so prioritize social interaction and hobbies.

Physical activity releases endorphins and helps reduce depressive symptoms.

If symptoms become overwhelming, consult a mental health provider for therapy or medication.

Take it from the experts: a few proactive steps can help you stay healthy and happy all winter long.



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# WINTERING WILD

*Nature's adaptations along the*  
*Lakeshore*

**BY SHANNA AVERY**



As winter settles in, the wild-life and natural landscapes that make their home along the Lake Michigan shoreline prepare for and adapt to the coldest months of the year - in the long wait for spring to reemerge.

As snow blankets the forests and dunes, shelves of ice create stunning and fascinating formation along the beach and shallows of Lake Michigan. As waves lap to shore, ice layers into formations that build up through the winter season, creating beautiful views that

should be appreciated from a safe distance.

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources cautions folks that “there is no such thing as safe ice.” Even in consistent cold conditions, pressure cracks can develop in the ice, and where there’s lake currents where water levels can change, or with currents at the mouths of rivers, the ice can shift and become unstable. People also should use extra caution when there’s ice on the lake but water near the shoreline.

While ice on the lake can be dangerous for humans, it can be most beneficial for aquatic animals, helping them survive the winter months beneath the ice’s surface, such as dragonflies, which spend the winter underwater protected by the ice while they feed on smaller organisms.

While some wildlife thrive under icy waters, others, such as the fowler’s toad, survive during the winter by hibernating in the sand and laying eggs in the warmer waters of interdunal ponds in the spring.



the fowler’s toad



Brandon Griffith, interpreter and program coordinator at Ludington State Park

According to Brandon Griffith, interpreter and program coordinator at Ludington State Park, the fowler’s toad, which is found in the southern U.S., is able to survive in Western Michigan along the coast of Lake Michigan thanks to interdunal pond systems.

“The fowler’s toad relies on warm water temperatures for its eggs it lays in the spring,” Griffith said. “That’s what the fowler toad relies on instead of Lake Michigan, which is quite cold and takes a long time to heat up. Interdunal ponds get heat from the sun and warms it up so the fowler toad can lay its

eggs in the springtime. That’s why this is the only area in the north where the fowler toad can live.”

Griffith said insects provide a food source for the fowler’s toads, which bury itself in about 12 inches of sand during hibernation seven months of the year. The fowler toad is a food source for other local species such as hognose snakes, some birds, raccoons and other species.

Griffith pointed out how the dunes, which are held into formation by Marrum grass with roots that grow 20 feet beneath the surface, form natural snow

fences, stopping the sand from eroding out into the parking lot.

“Without these fences, without these grasses here, the entire parking lot would be covered in sand, the roads would get covered in sand. That snow would blow away and we’d lose those dunes that we love here today,” he said.

Griffith shared how some of the dunes transition all the way through the forests on the back side of the dune with a thin layer of nutrient rich top soil, so trees can grow, such as deciduous trees and coniferous trees. The area is calmer and more resistant to wind, and out of the



sun – an environment animals rely on.

“Forested ecosystems are 10 degrees cooler in the summer and in the winter are 10 degrees warmer, almost like a built-in air condition heating system in the park,” Griffith said.

Animals such as deer, fox, squirrel and porcupines spend the winter season sticking close to these wooded areas, as their fur grows thicker and they store fat, lower activity levels, with some making dens in trees, under roots or in brush piles, waiting for the long anticipated spring.



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STEVE BEGNOCHE PHOTO

***SWEEPING TOWARD GLORY:***

# ***THE COOL SPORT OF CURLING***



STEVE BEGNOCHE PHOTO

## **BY STEVE BEGNOCHE**

On winter Sunday evenings from 5 to 7 p.m. at the West Shore Community College Ice Arena, the Ludington Area Curling Club gathers to curl — as in the sport of curling.

“Curling is a team sport, played on ice, where two teams take turns to slide stones made of granite towards a target — known as a House.” — World-Curling.org

You might have caught curling on a Winter Olympics broadcast.

Dan and Jen Hinderer, a Ludington couple instrumental in establishing the Ludington Area Curling Club (LACC) in 2018-19 to foster a local interest in the sport, said when Dan asks how people heard about curling, the most common answer is they watched it during the Winter Olympics.

Now LACC is a 501(c)3 charitable organization with a board of directors, a website, social media presence and 25 people on the paid membership list. Multiple hundreds have tried curling through LACC learn-to-curls. “Many just tried and decided it wasn’t for

them,” Dan, LACC president, said.

Dan and Jen, natives of the Detroit area, first saw curling telecast on the Windsor, Ontario, CBC-affiliate Winter Olympic broadcasts. However, they then didn’t know Michigan had curling clubs where they could learn and play the sport.

Later, while residing in Chicago, Dan’s brother invited them to a curling bonspiel — tournament -- to watch his brother’s visiting team compete. There they met three Chicago area clubs and subsequently tried curling at a learn to curls.

“We absolutely loved it,” Dan said.

They joined a Chicago club. Five years later, after a move to Indiana, the Hinderers joined an Indianapolis curling club. The main difference? The Chicago club had ice dedicated solely to curling while the Indianapolis club curled at an ice hockey rink. More about that difference to come.

When the Hinderers moved to Ludington as the new owners of the Lamp-lighter Bed and Breakfast, they brought a set of curling stones with them, but there was no local curling club.

Dan began to research where and how a curling club could be formed near Ludington.

“I latched on to West Shore Community College and the ice arena. They have been super friendly and super supportive. They have been great to work with,” he said.

The club now has a second set of stones so two games can be played simultaneously on the West Shore arena’s two “sheets” of playing area lined for curling. A sheet is about 150 feet long. At each end there is a round circle with red, white and blue rings — aka, the house.

The center ring of the house is called the button — think bullseye. Curlers attempt to slide the 44-pound stones as near as possible to or in the button. The stones are concave on the bottom so they slide more easily. The sheets are “pebbled” by spraying super-heated water to create a textured surface so the stone rides atop the pebbles with less ice contact. If a team has stones in a good scoring position, the curler throwing may try to place stones to block opponents





CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Left to right: Curling club officers Dan and Dani McGarry, and Jen and Dan Hinderer, a Ludington couple instrumental in establishing the Ludington Area Curling Club (LACC) in 2018-19 to foster a local interest in the sport.



STEVE BEGNOCHE PHOTOS

from reaching theirs in scoring positions. If the stones in scoring position belong to the opponent, the curler may seek to knock them away or land their stone even closer to the button.

Each ring has a different scoring value. Stones of the team whose stones are nearer to the button than any opponent's best stone are scored.

Play moves from end-to-end. The eight players – four per team -- take turns sliding an individual's two stones down the ice until all 16 stones are thrown during "an end." (Think inning, or round). Then they move to the end of the ice where the thrown stones rest, score the end, and begin a new end throwing back the opposite way.

A game is made of 8-10 ends, or less depending upon pace of play and time available.

A bit of curling trivia: all curling stones are made of granite from one

quarry in Scotland.

Clearly, curling has its own nomenclature. While it might look a bit like shuffleboard on ice, practitioners on an early season October Sunday night likened curling to golf or pool because one always tries to better their personal game even in a team setting.

The club's website describes curling as "chess on ice" because of the strategy involved.

Like most sports, curling is part skill, part practice, and part strategy. A little luck never hurts.

Hinderer often teaches the ABCs of curling – alignment, balance, and curl -- at learn-to-curl on ice and "floor curls" using the Ludington club's portable imitation ice sheet to demonstrate the sport in settings such as bars or at events.

Initially, the most difficult aspect is learning to balance while sliding on

one knee to throw the stone.

"My focus every time is balance," Hinderer said. "I want to make sure everyone stays safe, then curl." Proper alignment to deliver the stone to where the skip wants is taught next. Then Hinderer teaches putting a spin on the handle-topped stone upon release to put the curling into the game.

"It's a lot to learn and master, but it is all repetition, repetition, repetition," Hinderer said.

Perhaps curling's most unique feature is sweeping. Because ice and throws vary, sweepers often use brooms with a vinyl pad on the broom to sweep with pressure on the ice in front of the stone working its way down the sheet. The sweeping friction microscopically melts the pebbled ice surface allowing the stone to run further, Hinderer said.

"There are people that will talk





STEVE BEGNOCHE PHOTOS

sweeping for hours,” Hinderer said. “Sweeping helps the stone glide and maintain its momentum. Good sweepers can extend a stone 10-20 feet. All you can do for a ‘heavy’ stone is get out of the way.”

LACC board member Dani McGarry, who joined early on with her husband Dan, said sweeping is also used to control how much a stone curls. Like a bowling ball on a lane thrown with spin to curve it into pins, a curled stone heading down the sheet can arc – curl – as it enters the house. The curl could be intended to avoid or knock out of the way a stone blocking a scoring opportunity. Sweeping reduces the curl.

The “skip” stationed in the house points where he/she wants the thrower to try to land the stone, might suggest an alignment, and directs the sweepers when to sweep, when to stop sweeping, and how furiously to sweep. The sweepers shuffle-slide along just ahead of the moving stone, often sweeping as if there’s no tomorrow.

You’ve never seen so many guys sweeping so determinedly as you see curlers sweeping the line in front of a stone heading towards the scoring rings.

“It’s the only sweeping I’ve done,” quipped Adam Lavelly of Mears, noting sweeping isn’t one of his duties at home.

Lavelly enjoys the people in curling and that curling, like golf, is a competition to improve one’s personal performance while competing with others.

“You’re trying to be the best you can, whether throwing or sweeping,” he explained.

Hinderer sees it in a similar light. “It’s like golf, you call your own fouls, and celebrate a good shot whether it’s yours or your opponents.”

It’s a sport couples can do together. “Dan and I are really passionate about the sport,” Jen Hinderer said, adding it’s a big part of their marriage.

Seeing the sport, meeting people from all over the country and beyond, to bond over the game, the strategy of it, all appeal to her and Dan. As do the friendships the couple has built because of curling.

“We have some great friends in Scotland and Canada because of this sport. These are people we golf with and hike with,” Dan said, noting that’s how they became friends with the McGarrys.

“It carries over to all seasons of life,”

Jen said. “I would love to see the sport grow here.”

They long for a local facility dedicated to curling. Dedicated curling ice is smoother and less grooved than ice skating and hockey ice. Also, at dedicated facilities such as in Traverse City, the stones remain on the ice even after play is done. Thus, they remain at the ice temperature. Dedicated ice is precisely pebbled and cut for curling.

At West Shore, the stones are taken off ice after each event and stored in a rack at air temperature, which changes during the season. As play starts, stones are warmer than the ice and thus slower. Club members pebble the ice each time after its Zambonied twice – once with hot water to fill skate gouges as best able, and a second time without water to cut into and make a dry surface. Then a backpack sprayer with a copper wand is used to spray minute beads of heated water over the curling sheets to create beads upon which the stones glide.

Hacks and scoreboards also remain in place at dedicated facilities reducing set-up and tear-down time leaving more time for play. Dedicated curling facilities offer more flexibility in

schedules and, importantly, more opportunity for socializing with other curlers after play in the broom closet shop area or facility club, the Hinderers said.

Among other couples curling on the second night of the season were Jeannine and Scott Makowski. They retired to Ludington from Northville, near Detroit, and were curling for the second time.

A week earlier, they had participated in the season-opening Learn to Curl session. More learn-to-curls are planned for December and later in the season. Those interested in learning the sport should contact the club through its website, [curlludington.com](http://curlludington.com), or by email [ludingtoncurling@gmail.com](mailto:ludingtoncurling@gmail.com) to request a lesson at the rink during Sunday night play. Hinderer said the club is always open to welcoming newcomers to the sport.

“I’m here to have fun,” Jeannine Makowski said. As a youth the Ontario, Canada, native played volleyball and basketball, but hadn’t tried curling which long has had a home in Canada.

Curling began in the 16th Century in Scotland. According to Curling Canada, Scottish immigrants brought it to Can-

ada in the mid-19th Century. It caught on. Today, Curling Canada notes, “Curling has become an essential element of grassroots Canada. Through its long history, it became a sport attractive to all levels of society, all ages of participants – a lifetime persuasion.”

Curlers push off of the “hack” – kind of like a runner’s starting block – sliding on one foot with a special shoe or cover. The other foot trails behind on the leg kneeling on the ice. The rock is held in front by one hand on its handle. With practice, a broom can be held by the other hand and resting on that arm’s shoulder for balance and to use after the stone is released. After pushing off the hack, the curler and stone glide together as a unit, eyes on the desired placement of the stone in the house at the end of the sheet.

The launch can be as elegant as a ballet move. Then the sweeping begins with the skip shouting out, “Sweep! Sweep! Sweep!”

Sometimes there’s a clatter of a stone caroming off one or more already in the house. A well-placed throw is greeted by a shout of “good line,” “well placed,” or other positive exclamations by both the teammates of the thrower

and the opposition side.

At times a “light” stone falls short of a line that it has to pass to remain in play and is removed. At times, a “heavy” stone slides beyond play.

The Rev. John Brown took up curling to have something to do in winter.

“First of all, it’s fun,” he said. “It’s also a way for everybody to get involved. It’s not that athletic.” Because a bad back prevents him from the kneeling start, he uses a delivery stick that hooks into the handle of the curling stone. He walks the hooked stone to the throw line before pushing it on its way, shuffleboard like. “It allows me to participate,” he said. He plays every week.

“I like throwing the stones, the strategy of where you place the stones, and how fast you have to throw it,” Brown said.

As a beginner, Scott Makowskis held a plastic slider on the ice with his non-throwing hand for added balance when sliding on one knee to throw a stone.

After a fall following a release, Jeanine remarked “I focus so much on the stone, it doesn’t matter where I land. Plus, I’m close to the ground, so it doesn’t hurt.”

She finds sweeping a bit more dif-



STEVE BEGNOCHE PHOTOS





ficult and aerobic. Many of the sweepers smiled brightly as they swept. Special gripping shoes or sole covers are used when sweeping for grip. A sliding shoe or cover goes on the sliding foot when throwing.

“You can never be too sure-footed,” McGary added.

Those coming to play for the first time are advised to bring clean tennis shoes to put on before going on the ice, and to dress for warmth.

Scott Makowski enjoyed the experience, noting “It’s more exercise than you think.”

Dave Lyle, who lives near the West Shore arena, is in his third year of Sunday night club curling.

“I love it. It’s like pool. It’s so competitive,” he said. He likes planning the strategy.

“You have to get the balance down,” Lively said. “Once you do, you’re good to go.”

As an end progresses and more stones are in scoring or blocking position, strategy becomes extremely important for a throw to make a difference. At such times, the skip studies placement of resting stones and discusses with teammates possible lines of attack for the coming throw, and relates the set-up strategy to the curler up to throw.

Sometimes strategy works to a tee and opponents’ stones are knocked out of scoring position by a stone that replaces it in scoring position.

LACC participated in a couple “friendlies” last season, one at the Traverse City Curling Club they’ve visited for two years, and another at the Midland Curling Club.

“We took 5 teams. It gave us a great opportunity to show them what a state-of-the-art curling facility (Traverse City) is and to see the social aspect,” Dan Hinderer said.

There’s now a traveling U.S. 10 “trophy” for the winner of the Midland-LACC friendly to hold until the next competition.

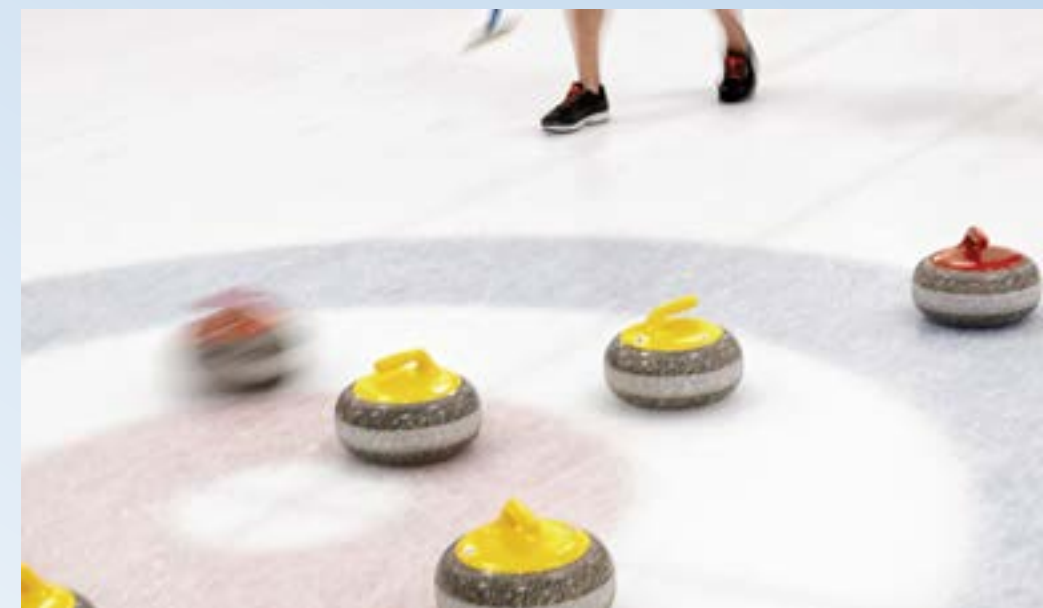
“We’re looking to put a team together to travel around,” Hinderer said. “That’s another aspect that drew us. ... We absolutely loved to travel with people, to sight-see.”

Jen Hinderer agreed travel curling makes for a fun athletic vacation, and a good time

This year, LACC is hosting league play on one sheet of the ice on Sundays at WSCC with the other sheet reserved for practice and instruction.

To learn more, visit [curlldudington.com](http://curlldudington.com). LACC membership and playing fees are explained, as well as more details about equipment and instructional opportunities and sign-up links to participate on a given Sunday night.

This winter might just be the right time to give curling a whirl. LACC curlers would be happy to show you the ropes – make that the stones.



STEVE BEGNOCHE PHOTOS





# 'SUCH A FUN PLACE TO BE'

*Winter adventures abound along West Michigan's lakeshore*

**BY DAVID L. BARBER  
PHOTOS BY JEANNE BARBER**

The LakeStyle lakeshore teases and pleases cold-weather adventurers of all ages.

Is snowshoeing your thing? There are no better snow-fluffed hills and flatlands

birding? Fat-tire biking? Sitting around a crackling campfire? The LakeStyle lakeshore is a magical magnet to all of 'em, and then some – packing snowballs, stacking snowmen, building snow forts, making snow angels, and more.

And what about those winter wonderland landscapes that take hostage



JEANNE BARBER PHOTOS

in the Mittenland than those located between Muskegon and Manistee counties – Mason, Oceana, Lake and adjoining counties, included.

Do you enjoy downhill or cross-country skiing? Ditto the above, with an explanation point!

Ice skating? Ice fishing? Winter

of your senses? Michelangelo, himself, would stand patiently in line at the notion of painting such wondrous sites, whereas all you have to do is to carry your camera.

What better place to start your winter wonderland adventure than at one of

the lakeshore's most sparkling jewels, the Ludington State Park. Located at the northern most end of the 7-mile long M-116, a century-old road that begins at the US 10 highway in downtown Ludington, the road meanders northward between the Lake Michigan shoreline and an impressive tract of sand dunes, to where it ends at the four-season park that's considered by many to be among the most beautiful in all of Michigan. It's certainly one of the busiest.

Located between the Mayberrian-sized Hamlin Lake to the east, and the snow 'n ice carved shoreline of Lake Michigan to the west, the park is divided into a trio of campgrounds year-round, though its Cedar Campground is the only one open during the winter.

The park, which is home to the historic black and white 112-foot tall Big Sable Point Lighthouse, is also home to the Friends of the Ludington State Park lantern-lit snowshoe walks that include bonfires, hot cocoa and marshmallow roasting – 6-8 p.m., Dec. 13, Jan. 10 and 24, Feb. 7 and 21, and March 7 – and at which snowshoes are provided for use, free of charge (if there is enough snow).

"A lot of it is going to be weather-dependent, whether we have a good snow year, or not," said Jim Gallie, park manager. "During the winter months we schedule with the Friends of the Ludington State Park, and our park interpreter, who schedule between four and six winter lantern-lit snowshoe hikes

"We have a lit trail of about three-quarters of a mile that uses kerosene lanterns. It's a self-guided tour and we'll have a fire circle or two set up – one usually at the start and one at the end.

"Our park interpreter hangs out at the fire circle that's farthest from the start of the hike, and is there to answer questions while people have hot cider, and tea, just a chance to sit around the fire, socialize and and enjoy the outdoors."

A park interpreter, said Gillie, "interprets our resources ... probably a





JEANNE BARBER PHOTOS

narrower concept is to think of them as a park naturalist because we have historic resources here – cultural, historical, or natural.”

Gallie said the park stays busy, even in the winter, “... especially on those nights when we have our snowshoe nights.”

“We do have free snowshoes for people, up to about 80 pairs,” he said. “We’ll have nights where we’ll have 300 or 400 people who’ll show up. Our interpreter also does guided hikes on Saturdays during the day, and those are very popular.”

Camping in the park, said Gallie, is another issue, altogether.

“It all depends on the weather, and the snowfall, and if the temperatures are mild – in the 20s or so – and we’ll see people come out and set up a camper. We actually have a group of people who hammock camp out here, every year.

They’ll bring out 30 or 40 people out for that event.

Hammock camping, said Gallie, is just as it sounds – campers hang out in hammocks that are “pretty souped up with tarps and quilts that go around them as well, to stay warm. They call it their ‘winter hang.’”

Gallie said workers also groom trails for cross-country skiing.

“We’ll have about seven miles of groomed trails,” he said. “We have a nice groomer that the Friends group purchased for us about 10 years ago. We definitely get out when we can, to set some tracks. It’s a beautiful place to go cross-country skiing.

“The Friends is a great group and they can turn out volunteers in a heartbeat. A lot of times they help us purchase things that might be difficult for us to other-

wise buy because we just won’t have the money needed in our budgets for some of the recreational activities.

“All of us who work here really, really want snow, and lots of it – it’s such a fun place to be in the winter.”

To make campground reservations go to [Michigan.gov/DNR](http://Michigan.gov/DNR).

If the 4,800 acres that make up the Ludington State Park aren’t enough for you to adventure out into during the winter, then consider the 540,187 acre Manistee National Forest, where an unending labyrinth of trails challenge snowshoe hikers and cross-country skiers of all levels.

If you do the latter – the Manistee National Forest – keep a watchful eye for black bear, white-tailed deer, fox, coyote, eagles, hawks and a menagerie of other furry and feathered creatures.



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If ice fishing is calling your name there are numerous inland lakes – Michigan has over 11,000 such lakes – that are teeming with bluegill, perch, walleye, bass, pike and more that test the ice fisherman.

At the southern sector of the LakeStyle area in Oceana County is the 22-mile long William Field Memorial Hart-Montague Trail, which is a snowshoe walker, cross-country skier and even a snowmobiler’s dream. And don’t be surprised if every now and then you’ll see a person on horseback walking that trail, too.

In Manistee County, the Big-M Recreation area, which is located on M-55 about 20 minutes east of Manistee, has about 18 miles of groomed ski trails through the hilly forest lands.

Two of the state’s most popular and historic downhill skiing resorts are within easy driving distance of the LakeStyle area. Crystal Mountain near Thompsonville in Benzie County and Caberfae Peaks located about 20 miles west of Cadillac both offer challenging and beginner ski runs, and both are located within a 30 minute drive from Manistee County.

For more information on winter recreational opportunities go to [michigan.gov/dnr](http://michigan.gov/dnr)





# Winters wonders all around

*STORY & PHOTOS BY  
STEVE BEGNOCHE*

VICTORY RD





STEVE BEGNOCHE PHOTOS

## By STEVE BEGNOCHE

It starts with a few flakes of falling snow. Or maybe following a few days of sharply falling temperatures.

Perhaps wind out of the north accelerates to a howl. Bare tree branches clatter. Maybe sleety ice pebbles blast on the ground, decks and bounce off streets and sidewalks.

Perhaps, there's little direct sunlight. The day is muted – gloomy even.

"It" is winter, a time writers and poets through the ages associate with death – a world void of life.

Many northerners board jets or drive South to seek warmer climes and sunshine.

I stay behind. Winter has a beauty and life of its own -- when you look for it and go out in it.

To enjoy winter, it helps to have a bit of childlike wonder. It helps to have a bit of outdoors knowhow when it comes to dressing for cold-weather activities.

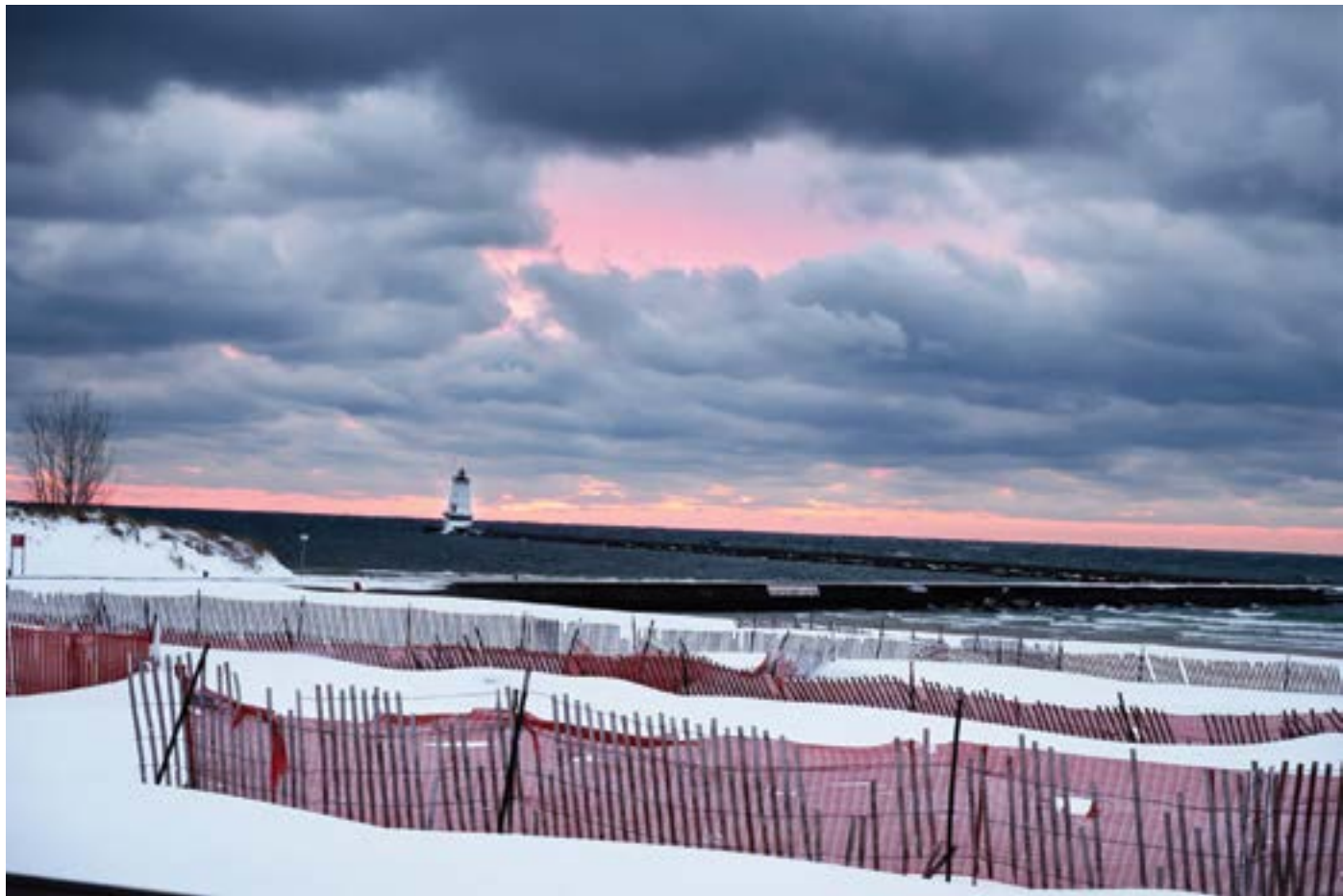
Staying warm when venturing out improves one's disposition.

It helps to like hot coffee, hot cocoa or hot tea when you return indoors.

Winter is a time of sweaters, long-johns, boots, gloves, mit-







STEVE BEGNOCHE PHOTOS



STEVE BEGNOCHE PHOTOS

tens, hats, scarves – or better yet neck gaiters: warm neck gear that also can be pulled up over your head to keep the wind out and the warmth in you. In extreme cold balaclavas: full- face ski mask with openings for the eyes, nose and mouth help.

Modern, “technical” clothing can keep you warm, dry and breathe to prevent sweating. Don it and head outside to experience winter beauty up close and personal, perhaps on a walk, a snowshoe or a pair of cross-country skis – but know and respect your limits. Winter can be unforgiving.

But, please, go out.

To be in the woods as snow falls – whether filtering down in snow-globe-like wonder, or blasting in a sideways wind – is to experience how our ancestors engage winter, and how the many animals still wandering about do to this day.

Fresh snow becomes an etch-a-sketch of animal travel patterns, from the tiny tubular trails of voles traversing just below the surface, to the stamped-out paths between trees of porcupines,



or the wandering meanders of white-tail deer. They leave behind oval body sides depressions where they slept, and scuffed up areas where they pawed for acorns below. And yes, don’t eat the yellow snow.

The grandkids like eating snow. Lots

of it. As an adult, I pass on that entrée knowing it collects whatever is in the air it passes through. That might be covering something I don’t want to ingest. Still, I smile as I watch them grab a handful of new snow and munch on it as happily as if it was a snow cone in July.







STEVE BEGNOCHE PHOTOS



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Is there a better sound than grand-kids sledding on a hill or enjoying a snowball fight (until someone lands a throw in a sibling's face)?

We have a row of hemlocks along a creek in our yard. One granddaughter, in particular, loved to walk beneath their snow-laden branches and shake them so they'd release their snow atop her – a personal blizzard.

Some mornings, deer stretch after a night's sleep under protection of the hemlocks. We've watched hawks take their unfortunate prey beneath those same branches to dine upon.

The hemlocks are a bird hotel in winter. Blue jays, tufted titmouse, black-capped chickadees, nuthatches and more race between them and the bird-feeders grabbing seed for energy. The

cardinal pair comes early and late heading to a different home in a cluster of brush beneath neighboring white pines. Mourning doves line on oak branches near the feeders as falling snow piles on their backs. Frequently, they hunker down near the flowing water of the creek. Does that unfrozen water provide heat to them?

No, winter isn't dead. Life abounds, though plants and trees may be dormant. Still, the red of a winterberry poking through snow, or the golden strands of marram grass standing tall on a windy dune, or white pine branches pinned down to the ground after a heavy, wet snow all add a dab of color in a winter world with more than 50 shades of gray.

Winter has its nuances.

Hawks sometimes hunt the birds at the feeders. Fox hunt voles and rabbits, mostly all unseen by us.

Turkeys have been known to trot into the feeder to scratch for corn droppings. One winter of deep snows, they beat a tunnel-like path to the feeder from the edge of the woods.

Squirrels – black, gray and white – have a contentious convention under those same feeders, jockeying for the best food and chasing one another up and down trees and across the canopy above.

That and more is just in the backyard.

Head along the Lake Michigan shoreline and take in the beauty – and fury at times – created by winter wind, snow, ice, sand, water and fleeting but sometimes intense light. All those days of

gray in December only make an intense sunrise or sunset all the more colorful. The hues of sand, snow, beach grass, an ice-crust shoreline, water and sky often is a muted, subtle palette, but one full of beauty. Marvel at the ring-billed gulls lined up on shore or a shoreside parking lot, facing into the wind, hunkered tight to the ground. How do they stay warm in such an inhospitable place? The wonders that are feathers provide all the insula-

tion they need.

We're blessed with dunes along our freshwater shoreline. On a sunny, January day, the light can be as brilliant as the air is cold. It's both literally and figuratively breathtaking. I love to walk in the dunes at such times. In my younger days I'd ski them, but conditions can be tricky and knees and ankles don't heal as well as they did decades ago. Still, standing atop a dune with morning light re-

flecting off of fresh, drifted snow, rippled from the wind of the night before, is a scene that sticks with me years later.

The gurgle of a small creek or river flowing through a snow-covered gulley or valley is music in winter.

The different kinds of ice – brash ice, black ice, pancake ice, shelf ice, ball ice, blue ice and many more – can appear and disappear suddenly on lakes, harbors and even, in extreme cold, rivers.

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Scientists cite at least 17 or more kinds of ice. Nor is all snow alike, with powder, wet snow, slush, pellets, graupel and more. Of course, individual flakes are as unique as individual people.

Before there were refrigerated ice rinks, skating was all done outdoors and understanding ice when skating on lakes was important. Now, the appearance of pancake or blue ice might cause a social media storm of posts.

Iced-over lakes also promote cities of shanties to erect overnight – especially when perch or bluegill are biting. Winter, it seems, rekindles a bit of the hunter-gatherer in us.

Farm fields are a sight to behold, too. Vast plains of snow with homesteads dot-





ting them, sometimes host geese or flocks of birds gleaning grain from beneath the snow and stubble. Sometimes those fields are home to visiting snowy owls – the beautiful white owls of the Arctic that descend upon us in irruption years when especially the young are forced south to find food. Look for snowies also on utility poles. They often like perching in unusual places. It's hard not to enjoy a snowy owl siting.

The red of a male cardinal or the bright blue of a jay also cheer one in winter. So does encountering the crow-sized, red-headed pileated woodpeckers jack-hammering a frozen dead tree sending chips of wood careening off.

Even a city or town blanketed in snow, quiet and, at night, lighted has an appeal. When I lived in town, I loved walking through parks, downtowns and streets at night as snow fell capturing light from street lights, or in season, Christmas lights.

Even a three-day near blizzard that stops travel, plugs sidewalks and rearranges the world around us is something to behold.

No, winter isn't dead. Currier and Ives images do exist. Beauty remains. Like much in life, one must venture forth to seek it.

The rewards are there.  
So is winter.  
Make the best of it.

**Steve Begnoche**, sbegnoche@yahoo.com, always has enjoyed that special bounty of winter, through skating, x-c skiing, ice fishing, walking, photography - and, yes, even snow blowing.



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