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On a sloping, lakefront lot in Galesburg, Ben and Tori Black of Haven Homes helped Don and Elaine shape a custom home that feels both considered and comfortable. From the front entry, the ceiling leads the eye through the living room and toward the covered deck. Beyond it, Campbell Lake comes into view. But visitors don't step into one vast, undefined space. The entry is intimate and cozy—a quiet welcome before the rooms open toward the lake.



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Find Your Next Outdoor Adventure in SW Michigan

PUBLISHER

PA Stinger Press

EDITOR

Jessica Luepke

ACCOUNTING MANAGER

Mike Luepke

349-9601 (Minuteman Press)

ADVERTISING

Jessica Luepke

jluepke@minutemanpress.com

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Jules Dash

Barbara Fisher

PRODUCTION

PA Stinger Press

PRINTING & MAILING

by PA STINGER PRESS

Terri Bennett, Ella DeLeon,

John Fahl, Mike Fahl,

Randy Fischer, Brian Fulbright,

Carl Gillespie, Ally Heersema,

Mike Majors

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jluepke@minutemanpress.com

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Apple Pie Bars

A Slice of Fall

This recipe was passed down to me by a wonderful friend I met back when I was newly married and just discovering my love for baking. The secret to its success? A layer of crushed cornflakes sprinkled over the bottom crust. They act as a sponge, soaking up excess apple juices so the crust bakes up perfectly crisp—never soggy! Here is the ultimate, crowd-pleasing version scaled for a standard 10x15-inch jelly roll pan.

Ingredients

For the Pastry Crust:

- 3 ½ cups all-purpose flour
- 1 ½ tsp salt
- 1 ½ cups (3 sticks) cold butter, cut into chunks
- 1 large egg yolk (or 2, reserving whites for topping)
- ¾ cup to 1 cup cold milk or ice water (adjust as needed until dough binds)
- 2 tsp sugar
- 1 cup cornflakes cereal, slightly crushed and sprinkled over the prepared crust

For the Filling

- 8 to 10 medium tart apples (like Granny Smith or Honeycrisp), peeled, cored, and thinly sliced (about 7–8 cups of slices)
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 2 tsp ground cinnamon
- ¼ tsp ground nutmeg (optional)
- 2 tbsp butter, dotted over the apples

For the Topping & Glaze:

The reserved egg white (beaten until foamy) + 1 tsp water or milk

A small sprinkle of cinnamon-sugar for the very top

Optional simple glaze: 1 cup powdered sugar mixed with 1–2 tbsp milk and a splash of vanilla

Instructions

Preheat oven to 350°F (175°C). Lightly grease a 10x15-inch jelly roll pan.

Make Crust: Mix flour and salt in a large bowl. Cut in cold butter until coarse crumbs form. In a small bowl, whisk egg yolk and cold milk (or water). Stir into flour mixture until dough forms. Divide dough, making one half slightly larger.

Bottom Crust: Roll out the larger dough portion to fit the pan. Transfer to pan, pressing along the bottom and sides.

Cornflakes: Sprinkle crushed cornflakes evenly over the bottom crust.

Apple Filling: Toss sliced apples with granulated sugar, cinnamon, and nutmeg. Spread evenly over cornflakes. Dot top with small bits of butter.

Top Crust: Roll out remaining dough and drape over apples. Fold bottom edges over top crust and crimp to seal.

Finish: Brush top crust with reserved foamy egg white; sprinkle with sugar and cinnamon. Cut a few small slits to vent steam.

Bake: Bake 45–60 minutes until golden brown and apples are tender.

Glaze & Serve: Whisk powdered sugar and milk, drizzle over warm bars if desired. Cut into squares and serve.

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By Barbara Fisher

Photos Courtesy of Gull Lake Community Schools



Community Schools

The Gull Lake Community Schools spans 165 square miles and parts of Kalamazoo, Barry and Calhoun counties, connecting lake-area, village and rural communities.

“Our story is one of proud communities coming together. During the 1964–65 school year, the East Cooper, Kellogg, Richland, and Yorkville school districts consolidated to form Gull Lake Community Schools. The name Gull Lake gave our new district a shared identity, rooted in the lake and the communities it has long connected. Our first graduating class was the Class of 1968, and students from the former districts selected the Blue Devils as the mascot for their new combined high school—an early symbol of the pride and unity that continues to define us. Our current high school opened in 2007. Today, Gull Lake Community Schools continue to reflect the strength of the communities that came together to create it. We are a lake-centered, regional district with deep ties to Richland, Kellogg, Hickory Corners, and the surrounding townships. While we honor the history that shaped us, we remain focused on building a strong future for every student,” states Drew Bordner, Superintendent, Gull Lake Community Schools.

Gull Lake offers education to about 4,600 students from young-fives through high school. The Gull Lake Early Learning Center (preschool / early childhood offers the Great Start Readiness Program and tuition-based preschool. Two elementary schools (Kellogg and Richland) serve young fives through second grade. The Thomas M. Ryan Intermediate School houses students in grades 3-5. The Gull Lake Middle School is the next

step in the continuum, serving grades 6-8. Gull Lake High School completes the K-12 educational journey. The Gull Lake Virtual Partnership is available for K-12 with blended options (including homeschool partnerships). An alternate high school, Gateway Academy, is available for students in grades 9-12 offering a smaller setting with individualized planning, academic support, and opportunities to build life skills. Before and after school programming is available.

Gull Lake High School was named one of Michigan’s top 100 high schools by U.S. News & World Report in 2024. Only 678 schools met the criteria to be ranked out of a total of 1,259. Gull Lake ranked No. 96 (out of 1,339) among Michigan public high schools in Niche’s 2026 rankings. The Thomas M. Ryan Intermediate School is a Leader in Me Lighthouse School, where student leadership is woven into its daily culture, academics and environment. Gull Lake also offers Project Lead the Way, which gives students hands-on opportunities to design, collaborate, and solve problems through STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) learning.

Additionally, students have opportunities for elementary enrichment through ExCEL (Exploration in Critical Thinking to Enhance Learning), advanced middle school coursework, and Advanced Placement courses at the high school level. Spanish is offered in grades K–12. High school students are able to earn college credit through dual enrollment and Gull Lake Early College offers an additional pathway that extends through a fifth year of high school. This program blends the earning of a high



school diploma with up to two years of college credit, or an associate degree, while still in high school. Annually, the Gull Lake Community Schools Foundation honors top graduating academic scholars and the staff member each scholar selected as making a meaningful impact on their education.

Academics are not the only pathway for students to learn and achieve valuable life skills; athletics, clubs and the arts are also part of the continuum.

Gull Lake is part of the Southwestern Michigan Athletic Conference and was “the first recipient of the MHSAA Exemplary Athletic Award and the first recipient of the MHSAA SCOPE Award, recognizing a positive perspective on high school athletics. These honors reflect a tradition of valuing sportsmanship and the student experience alongside competition,” notes Karen Furlong, Athletic Director. She goes on to say, “Gull Lake Athletics has earned 10 state championships in boys soccer, girls soccer, girls volleyball and boys cross country. Gull Lake offers 27 high school sports and 15 middle school sports, providing students with opportunities to compete, grow and represent their school in a wide variety of activities. Those sports include an incredible 51 high school teams and 26 middle school teams.”

Students participate in award-winning bands, choir, visual arts, and the high school Performing Arts Company. The high school band has earned superior ratings at Michigan School Band Orchestra Association festivals.

The Gull Lake Center for the Fine Arts offers an 880-seat auditorium and art gallery where students





can perform, exhibit their work, and share the arts with the wider community.

Students can explore their interests and develop leadership skills through such clubs as robotics, CyberPatriot, DECA (preparing high school students for careers in marketing, finance, hospitality and management), Model UN, Quiz Bowl, Student Senate and service organizations.

Superintendent Bordner summarizes with, “When we listen to one another, work together, and remain focused on what is best for every student, there is no limit to what we can accomplish together.” For more information about Gull Lake Community Schools, please visit their website: gulllakecs.org.



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Holly's Halloween

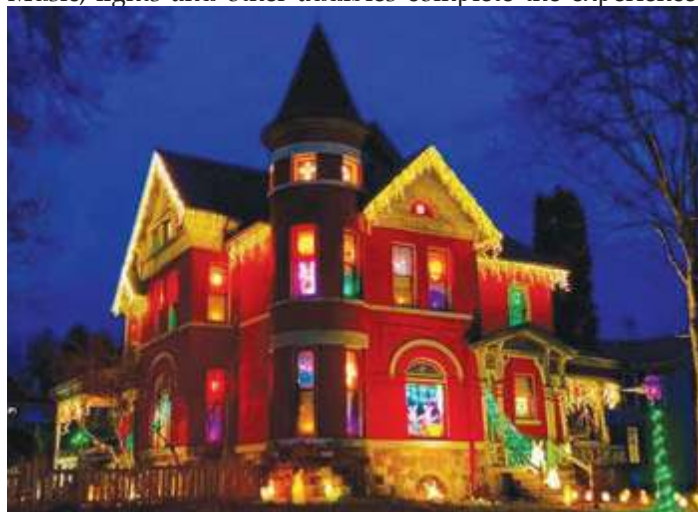
By Barbra Fisher

Holly Harnden is not only known in Marshall, but in viewing her guest book, her stunning holiday-themed-decorated home is a destination point. Not only does she bring joy to visitors, but her selfless efforts also benefit the greater Marshall business community, home to the four-generation Schuler's Restaurant & Pub plus other unique and delightful shops.

Her home, an 1886 brick Queen Ann three-story home sits on a large corner lot. As an aside, the builder also constructed railroad stations throughout Michigan. Holly has a clear vision for her displays and her well-thought-out presentations are a visual (and auditory) feast.

Holly decorates her home "for the pure joy that it brings to others" hitting all the major holidays and earning her the moniker of Holiday Holly. Virtually all of the funding for decorations and upkeep comes from Holly's pocket and virtually all of the labor is hers. We won't give away her age, but her efforts deserve an extra nod of appreciation (and awe) given she is well past retirement age and still works full-time to make ends meet, just like the rest of us. She does confess to accepting help with dragging out the heavier display items and for placing the new giant spider on her roof. At the urging of friends, she put up a donation box for visitors who feel inclined to lend a helping hand and she is inordinately grateful to those who choose to do so. Her electric bill alone is staggering.

It's worth hearing the reactions to the Halloween display visitors, each excitedly pointing out their favorite. What will yours be? The large, vintage carriage with skeleton passengers, driver and horse outside the carriage house? The dancing, ghostly skeletons that grace one of the front windows? The interactive creatures who pop out of the yard? How about the girl on the swing? The skeleton climbing up the side of the house (and its legs move!) Given the macabre nature of skeletons and creatures, the display isn't really scary which makes it a draw for all ages, even when things pop out of the ground. There is no gore. Music, lights and other audibles complete the experience.





Holly's Home, in celebration of Independence Day

Many components of the display are vintage and are no longer manufactured, making this display all the more impressive. Holly changes up the displays from year to year to keep it fresh. On any given night you'll see parents with infants, toddlers being pulled in wagons, youth, adults and grandparents. Holly has taken note of a few visitors who tugged at her heart strings: a 100 year old woman, persons on the autism spectrum and a woman who was terminal but wanted to see the display. On any given night, Holly is out there mingling.

Holly and her late husband, Scott, closed on their Queen Anne home on Halloween in 2003 and never sought financial gain or the limelight in sharing their decorating passions. However, well-deserved recognition came to Holly last year, something that brought tears to her eyes, when WKFR honored her with the "Best Halloween Display in West Michigan" followed by being named the winner of "Light Up Kalamazoo" for her holiday light display.

Visitors may see Holiday Holly's efforts at 401 E. Mansion Street (we see the irony as well), Marshall. Visit her on Facebook.



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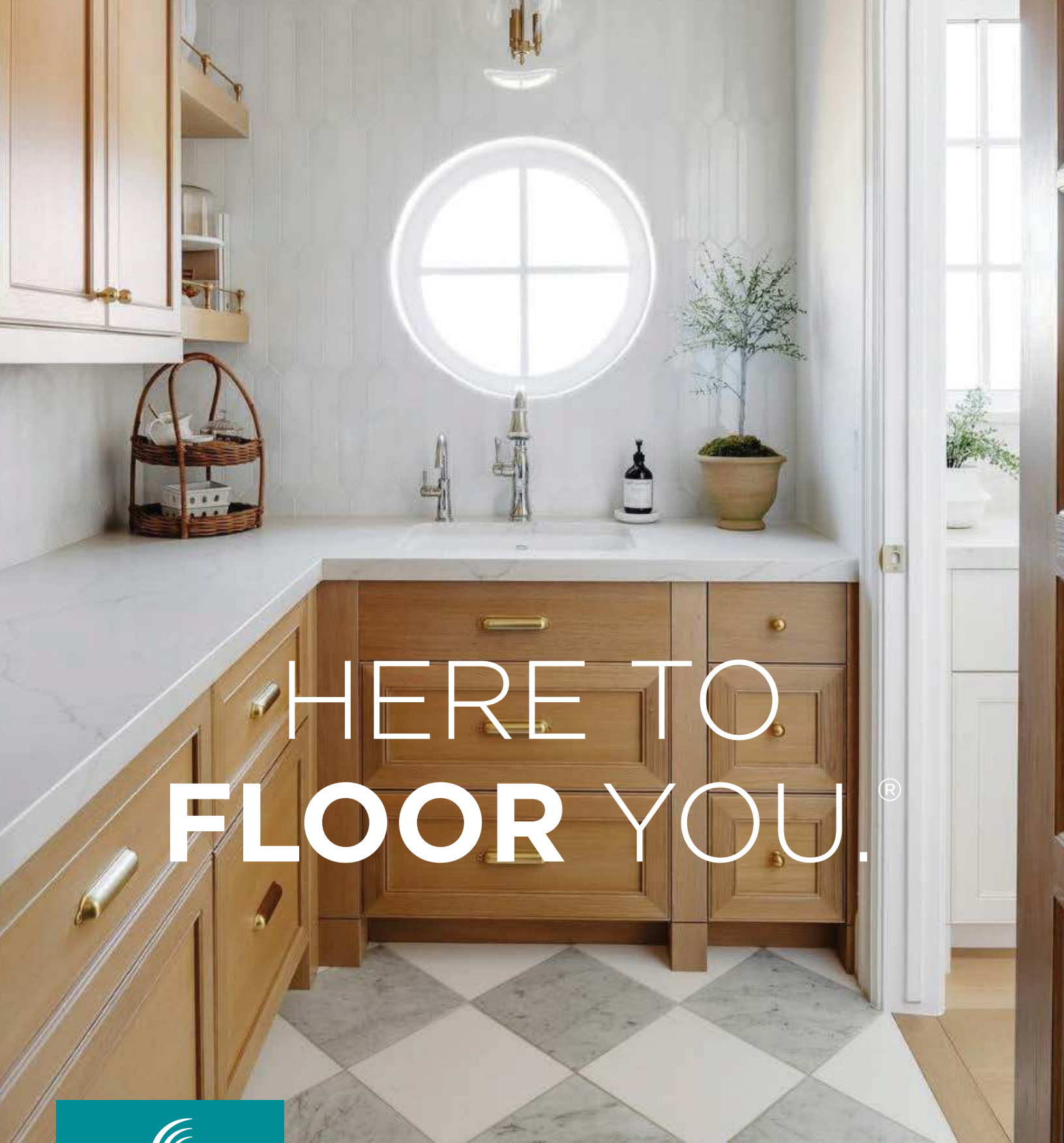
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A Lake View and a Place to Gather

By Jules Dash

Photography by Kris Walker

On a sloping, lakefront lot in Galesburg, Ben and Tori Black of Haven Homes helped Don and Elaine shape a custom home that feels both considered and comfortable.

From the front entry, the ceiling leads the eye through the living room and toward the covered deck. Beyond it, Campbell Lake comes into view. But visitors don't step into one vast, undefined space. The entry is intimate and cozy—a quiet welcome before the rooms open toward the lake.

That sense of arrival reflects a larger challenge in the design: how to make a home that opens generously to its setting without feeling overwhelming. The answer began with the land. Don and Elaine's lot, just over two acres in the Weathervane subdivision, drops about 15 feet toward the water. They wanted ranch-style living with a walkout basement, a substantial garage, and curb appeal from both the cul-de-sac and the lake.

Ben and Tori Black of Haven Homes joined the project when the architectural plans were about three-quarters complete. The homeowners had already worked closely with an architect who regularly partners with Haven Homes. Once the Blacks were awarded the project, they brought a builder's perspective to the final planning, working through details in the field and on paper

so the home would sit naturally on the site.

One of the clearest examples is beside the garage. Along one side, Haven Homes built a substantial concrete wall that functions much like a basement wall. It allows the garage to follow the hillside, settling it into the grade instead of leaving the structure perched above the slope. The wall is a practical response to the terrain, but it also helps the house feel grounded in its setting. From the street, the garage reads as part of the home's overall form; from the lake, the house meets the changing elevation with a walkout below.

The exterior carries that relationship with the landscape into its materials. Dark siding gives the home a modern presence, while natural stone and wood accents bring texture. Generous roof overhangs and traditional details soften the lines. The aim was a home with character that felt current without being tied to a passing trend.

Inside, the roofline continues the connection from the front of the house toward the water. The vaulted ceiling carries the eye through the living room and toward the covered rear deck. Don and Elaine wanted the roof elements to share centerlines and preserve that long view. Yet the entry needed to feel welcoming and proportional before the larger spaces unfolded. The Blacks gave the









entry a vaulted ceiling of its own, with the same pitch and centerline as the main roof but set lower. Visitors arrive in a more intimate space, then move naturally into the open living area. That transition matters because openness alone does not make a room inviting. A large stone fireplace wall anchors the living area, giving the eye a place to rest as the room extends toward the lake. The masonry wraps behind the fireplace and continues into the hallway, carrying the stone through several connected spaces. On the other side, accent lights illuminate photographs Don and Elaine have collected on their travels. The wall links the home's natural materials with the owners' own stories.

Cabinetry, trim, and carefully chosen finishes add more detail without competing with the view. Built-ins and substantial molding give the rooms definition; wood and stone bring texture to the clean, modern lines. The interior has its own presence, but it doesn't try to outshine the landscape. Its materials and details make the open rooms feel finished and personal, while Campbell Lake remains the strongest visual element.

That connection continues outdoors. The ceiling draws the eye toward the covered deck, and the outdoor living areas extend that path beyond the house. The Blacks spent time designing these spaces as extensions of the interior, comfortable and practical enough for everyday use. With the lake just beyond, the deck offers room to gather, entertain, or simply step outside.

During the Kalamazoo-area Parade of Homes, where the project was named a People's Choice winner, visitors often commented on how comfortable the house felt. Despite its size and high level of finishes, it didn't seem too formal or too large to enjoy. That response speaks to the balance the home was designed to strike: generous rooms and a strong visual connection to the lake, with personal details and a welcoming scale along the way.

Ben and Tori's partnership is part of that story, too. Ben brings the builder's perspective; Tori contributes her eye as the designer. That kind of partnership is familiar in the building world, but the way they complement one another is especially clear here. In conversation, they compliment one another and defer to each other's strengths. Their ease together, and the joy they take in their work, come through clearly. They approach the project as a team, just as the home brings together the people who live there, the craftspeople who shaped it, and the scenery in which it is set.

For the Blacks, a custom home should be more than beautiful. It should feel personal, work efficiently, and show craftsmanship that will endure. Here, those aims take shape in the way the house meets its hillside and natural materials frame a view that needs little embellishment. Campbell Lake may draw the eye first. The home makes room for people to gather there and make the place their own.







Blue skies. Riots of color. Pleasant temperatures. Crisp air. No bugs!

By Barbara Fisher
Photos Courtesy of SWMLC

It's fall in Michigan, a picturesque time to get outside. Challenge yourself to visit all 19 public nature preserves in southwest Michigan that the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy (SWMLC) has helped conserve and open to the public.

Amelia Hansen, Media Specialist for SWMLC, describes the organization as “a local nonprofit conservation organization that works with people in the community to improve habitat, protect water quality, support biodiversity, strengthen our region’s climate resiliency, connect people with nature, and help families conserve the land they love.”

Hansen adds: “SWMLC is governed by a board of directors, representative of the nine-county region we serve, with a professional staff and many dedicated volunteers. SWMLC works with willing landowners to conserve their land. Together, we protect endangered and threatened habitats and species, rural character and open space, agriculture and passive recreation, and the extraordinary vistas that give this region its distinctive character.”

The 19 preserves span seven of the nine counties in SWMLC’s service region. All are open from dawn to dusk, 365 days a year, and admission is free. Donations are gratefully accepted through the SWMLC website.

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Cass County

Spirit Springs Sanctuary

Kalamazoo County

Bow in the Clouds Preserve
Chipman Preserve
Wolf Tree Nature Trails

St. Joseph County

Coon Hollow Preserve
Corey Lake North Bay Preserve
Hidden Marsh Sanctuary

Van Buren County

Black River Preserve
Jeptha Lake Fen
Pilgrim Haven Natural Area
Porter Legacy Dune
Portman Nature Preserve

Plan your visit

The SWMLC website offers detailed directions, including GPS coordinates; printable site maps or maps for your phone; descriptions of each preserve, including its unique features and topography; complete rules; and histories of the land and the community efforts that helped protect it. Avenza Maps is free for basic and recreational



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use and lets visitors track their progress on interactive trail maps at many preserves. Unless otherwise noted, restrooms are not available. Dogs are permitted on a six-foot leash. Please leave no trace by taking all trash and pet waste with you when you leave. Parking lots are not cleared in winter, but the preserves remain open and offer beauty in every season.

Armintrout-Milbocker Nature Preserve Fall

The 142-acre preserve is in the City of Allegan, though the forest makes it feel far removed from town. The 0.8-mile White Trail is eight feet wide and passes through oak and pine forests with views of the Kalamazoo River. With fewer grade changes, it is the more accessible loop. The 1.4-mile Yellow Trail is four feet wide and has more elevation changes, some fairly steep. It offers high overlooks and riverside views.

The preserve is home to a red oak with a five-foot-diameter trunk, 60 bird species (including eagles), and 560 plant species, including the rare Hairy Leafcup wildflower. Walking, hiking, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and trail running are permitted. Trail blazes and maps mark the routes at various junctions.

The preserve's land served a number of purposes before the Armintrout and Milbocker families generously donated it rather than see it developed. The Christmas tree for the Governor's Mansion came from land just outside downtown Allegan. The White House Christmas tree came from across the river when Michigan native Gerald Ford was president.

The preserve is at 137 Thomas Street, Allegan.

Bow in the Clouds Preserve

The 73-acre preserve is in Kalamazoo and has one mile of trails. An accessible gravel loop runs from the parking

lot to a platform overlooking the marsh. From the loop, a wide, accessible crushed-gravel trail winds over a bridge to a wetland boardwalk. Another dirt trail leads from the boardwalk back to the gravel loop and parking lot. A short out-and-back spur leads to a small pond where waterfowl gather. The spring-fed wetlands help protect the water quality of the City of Kalamazoo's downstream well fields. Near the parking lot, visitors may notice native grasses and flowers. Snowshoeing is permitted in winter.

The property once belonged to the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph. Although it was not part of the formal Nazareth campus, also owned by the Congregation, many will remember the college and Motherhouse that once stood there, along with the stately fieldstone walls beside the road. The nuns' graves are marked by humble headstones near the preserve's border.

The sisters embraced environmental concerns. Sister Virginia Jones started Kalamazoo's first Earth Day in the early 1970s. The Bow in the Clouds Natural Area served as an outdoor classroom and was dedicated in 1973. As the Congregation aged, the property was transferred to SWMLC in 2007.

Black River Preserve

The 121-acre Black River Preserve in Van Buren County features deep ravines, beech-maple forests, streams, rolling uplands, and views of the Black River. Snowshoeing and cross-country skiing are wintertime favorites. Its 3.8 miles of color-coded dirt trails include hilly sections, bridges, and boardwalks. The preserve has one mile of frontage along the Black River and another mile combined along three tributary streams.

The preserve provides nesting and breeding habitat for a variety of waterfowl and other waterbirds. A botanical census identified 400 plant species. Its 60 acres of wetlands





play a vital role in the Black River watershed. The preserve is in the 69400 block of 8th Avenue, South Haven.

Tempted? Let's start checking off our visits! For complete information and photos of the three featured preserves and the other 16, visit the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy website at swmlc.org.



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A Proactive Approach to Year-Round Pest Control

By Barbara Fisher

Colder weather is on the Michigan horizon, and while homeowners and businesses are preparing for winter, bugs and critters that overwinter are doing the same. Overwintering pests (their life cycles don't end with the first hard frost) include stink bugs, Asian lady beetles, mice, spiders, earwigs, and a long list of other less prevalent pests. Property owners can take a few proactive steps now to prevent or reduce unwanted guests sharing their quarters.

Morgan Arndt, Field Commercial Supervisor at Keller Pest Control, suggests several preventive steps.

1. Check foundations, rooflines, and gutters for access points, and fill cracks with caulk or other filler material. Pests are opportunistic and will easily find gaps. Did you know that mice and bats can enter through a gap as small as one-quarter of an inch? Under minimally hospitable conditions, mice can reproduce year-round. Both bats and field mice can carry disease and have no place in your home.

2. Inspect screens and replace torn mesh.

3. Remove easily accessible food supplies. Sweep and vacuum regularly (and don't skimp on using the onboard vacuum tools to get edges, corners, or basements). Delectable treats such as dead skin cells (where humans are, dead skin cells follow) aren't readily detectable to the human eye; however, to spiders, carpet beetles, and mites, these sloughed-off cells are a source of food. Mice will enthusiastically pilfer from pet food bags as well as chew into packaged foods in pantries, cupboards, and basements, frequently creating stashes of their ill-gotten gains

elsewhere in the house.

4. Address damp areas. Silverfish, cockroaches, earwigs, fungus gnats (found in overwatered houseplants), drain flies, and centipedes are a few creatures that thrive in damp conditions. (Termites and carpenter ants are also fans and merit their own section later in the article.)

5. Complete a perimeter check of the footprint of the house. Are there plantings near the foundation that need trimming? Has the wind blown fall leaves into mounds against the foundation? Are tree branches, firewood, wood fencing, or similar materials creating a bridge into your home or business? Is mulch hard and compacted and in need of aerating or replacement (think of the pests that colonize under a large rock in the yard; the same thing is happening under compacted mulch)? All of these conditions offer an inviting exterior habitat and create a red carpet for pests seeking cushier accommodations inside homes and businesses.

If preventive measures need extra support, Ms. Arndt says pest management may include a single application or recurring monthly, seasonal, or quarterly service from a professional with expertise in pest identification, management, and safe abatement for people and pets. Seasonal service might include exterior treatment from April to October; quarterly service might include year-round interior and exterior treatment. When selecting a pest control company, ask whether it customizes service to homeowner or commercial needs after a thorough



inspection. Does it explain how an integrated pest management program can provide long-term results? Does it assign the same technician for each treatment to ensure continuity? Does it look for problems the homeowner may not know about, such as termites or carpenter ants? Is the service affordable and convenient?

Ms. Arndt notes that this has been a particularly robust year for ants and spiders. Bees and wasps are an issue during the fall. Keep lids on trash cans and dumpster lids closed at complexes and food establishments. Wasps and bees are pollinators and are also drawn to plants that are still blooming. As a reminder, swatting at yellow jackets can result in more than one painful sting from a single insect. Ground bees can go unnoticed; stepping on a nest or mowing over it can result in painful stings. Homeowners are advised to wait until dusk or early dawn, when all the worker bees have returned to the nest, and then use a product such as Raid Wasp Spray. Spray liberally into the hole, then cover it for 24 hours with wet cardboard or a container that fully covers the hole.

Know your bugs! September and October bring out swarms of Asian lady beetles, particularly on the south and west sides of homes on warm, sunny days. The beetles seek warmth in attics to overwinter. They bite and have an unpleasant odor. They may have 0-19 spots and range from pale orange or yellow to dark red or black. True ladybugs overwinter outside,



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don't bite, and are bright red with 7-11 spots.

Ms. Arndt notes that a few invaders are worthy of special mention: termites, carpenter ants, fleas, and bed bugs. Termites feed on the cellulose found in damp wood and plant materials and can wreak havoc before they are noticed. Telltale signs of termites include mud tubes, discarded wings, visible wood damage, or wood that sounds hollow when tapped.

Carpenter ants, like termites, seek damp or rotting wood, but unlike termites, they don't eat the wood; they chew through it to build nests and tunnels. As with termites, a large colony can cause costly damage within a home or outbuilding before anyone recognizes the problem. Telltale signs of an infestation include accumulations of sawdust in affected areas; colonies may also be heard in the walls at night, when it's quiet.

(We are not making this up.) Observing any large ant indoors should put homeowners on notice. If a sighting can't be attributed to a lone ranger, action is needed to protect the integrity of the building.

Bed bugs and fleas feed on mammals, unlike most other pests, and can hitchhike unnoticed into homes on common everyday items. Ms. Arndt says, "While having regular pest control services does not guarantee that you won't experience these unwanted guests, having a knowledgeable technician with regular inspections can help mitigate these issues if they arise."

Ms. Arndt observes that there are numerous products that homeowners or businesses can apply. She stresses caution when working with any pesticides: carefully read the label before use and keep them away from people and pets. Pesticides break down, so repeated applications may be needed for long-term effectiveness.

For over 30 years, Keller Pest Control has served Kalamazoo, Portage, South Haven, Battle Creek, Three Rivers, Marshall, and everywhere in between. Please visit its website for additional information: kellerpestcontrol.com.



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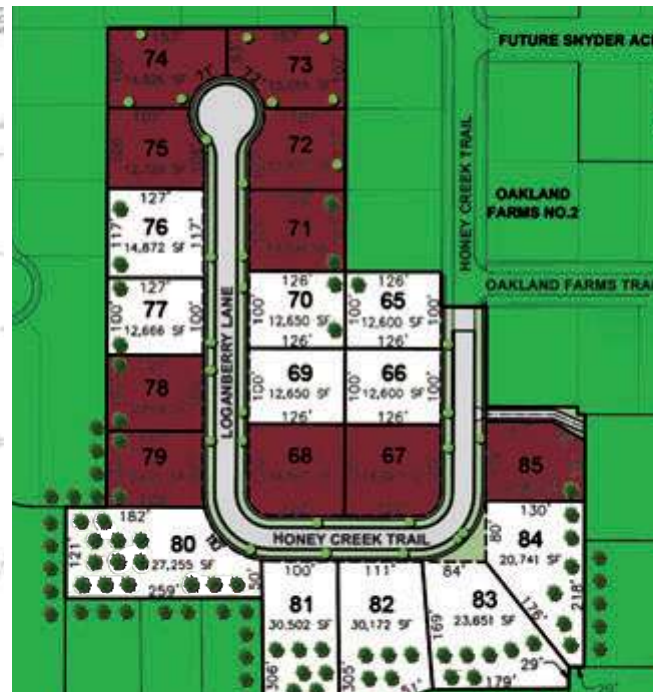
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