

# THE ELBERTA ALERT <sup>\*free!</sup>

vol. 100 no. 3

A Community News Organ

Fri., Apr. 29, 2011

## SHOW US THE MONEY: VILLAGE ON STATE FISCAL "WATCH LIST"

The headline on the front page of the *Record-Patriot* two weeks ago was no less disturbing for being unsurprising: "Elberta 'Working Diligently' on Financial Woes Cited by State."

According to a chart released on the *Detroit Free Press* website on April 6, Elberta is on a state financial watch list and is "flagged for possible state intervention." We scored an 8 out of 10 based on our fiscal 2009 audit. Frankfort, by contrast, scored a 2, placing it in the category "neutral—no action necessary." Gilmore Township was also in the clear as of 2009, with a score of 3.

Under Governor Snyder's new law, the Local Government and School District Accountability Act (hereafter referred to as Public Act no. 4), governments and school boards found to be in sufficient financial trouble may be disbanded and governance assumed by appointed officials—the so-called emergency financial managers. These managers will have the authority,

without public input, to do what they deem necessary to get the municipality or school back in the black. Such measures could include selling off key assets, closing schools, severing contracts, firing public employees, and cutting programs and commissions.

The *Alert* spoke with Terry Stanton, public information officer for the Michigan Department of Treasury, to find out the implications of our watch status. According to Stanton, rather than the fiscal indicator scores, Treasury will be watching for the occurrence of any one of 18 "triggering events" listed in Public Act no. 4. A few examples of trigger events include: (a) The Village Council might actually request that it be preliminarily reviewed; (b) a creditor may write to the state claiming that a payment from the Village is six or more months past due; (c) the local government might fail to "timely file" an annual financial budget; (d) the Village may end a fiscal year in a deficit condition. Any one of

these trigger events could, according to Stanton, prompt a preliminary review. And at least one of these events has happened here: Elberta has a major fund deficit in excess of \$500,000. And yet, so far, Elberta hasn't hit any of the triggers hard enough to bring down a preliminary review, according to Stanton.

Like our financial problems, the data reflected in the fiscal indicator scores is old (it's based on the 2009 audit), and the Village has been participating in a deficit elimination program with the state for several years now. The approved Village budget for 2011/12 entails \$115,340 in cuts, which Council president Reg Manville says is the largest budget cut he's ever seen. The cuts include a total of \$73,298 to the general fund, streets and sewer fund, and garbage fund; the elimination of one of our DPW employee positions; and the elimination of spousal benefits for our Village employees.

How did we get here? Dave Wilson,

CPA, who has been performing the Village audit for several years now, came to the April 21 council meeting to explain. Compared with Benton Harbor, which Wilson also audits and whose government was recently deactivated by a financial manager, we look pretty good. Their deficit is in the millions of dollars, and they had 17 writeups for material deficiencies in their accounting for last year, whereas we had only one minor write-up for separation of accounting duties. Wilson remarked that it wouldn't make sense for a \$70,000–\$80,000 per year financial manager (whose salary the Village would have to pay out of our general fund) to be instated here. We'd just be that much further in debt.

Wilson traced our deficit to cost overruns involved in the development of the waterfront park and Lifesaving Station five years ago, costs racked up in brownfield, lead, and asbestos mitigation, and to legal fees for the removal of the SS *City of Milwaukee*. Along with the brownfield cleanup required on the old Ann Arbor Railroad site purchased from the Michigan Department of Transportation, these

continues on page 4



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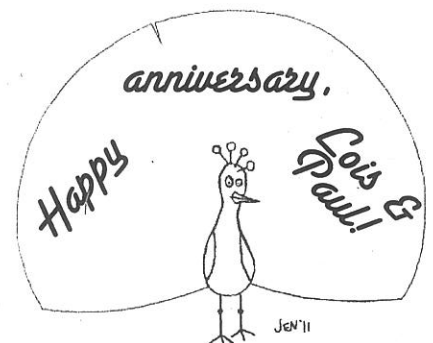
### PRINCE PETEY'S PUBLIC NOTICE

#### CENTENNIAL COOKBOOK CALL FOR RECIPES

A committee is updating the 2000 *Elberta Millennium Cookbook* for the 100-year anniversary of the Village's name. To be published this summer, the book will raise funds for the Village, Parks and Rec, and the *Elberta Alert*. To submit recipes or join the committee, call Jennifer Wilkins, (231) 651-0798.

**DON'T FORGET TO VOTE MAY 3** Gilmore Township residents vote at the Library on a millage renewal for the Benzie Bus, which is used by a growing number of Elbertians.

**SPRING CLEANUP, MAY 14** Bring a truckload of trash to the Village Garage from 9 am to 2 pm for a \$25 fee. Please, no tires, household garbage, or appliances that still contain freon. Proof of Village/Gilmore residency required.



**LOIS AND PAUL SCHRAM GOLDEN WEDDING ANNIVERSARY** Married 50 years on May 26—we wish you many more, folks!

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# PUTTING OUT FIRES

By Emily Votruba

DIANE JENKS, president pro-tem, led the meeting in Reg Manville's absence, and introduced Village auditor Dave Wilson. Mr. Wilson gave an overview of the Village's financial situation (see "Watch List," page 1). Mr. Wilson traced our major fund deficit to cost overruns in the development of the waterfront park and Lifesaving Station, along with legal fees for the removal of the SS *City of Milwaukee*,

which he referred to as a "big rust bucket." "How would you like to have the *City of Milwaukee* back?" Wilson asked, rhetorically. A few citizens in attendance vocalized in the affirmative. "Well, it cost you \$100,000 to get rid of it," Wilson said.

Eric Luxford, Frankfort fire chief, suggested that Elberta align its fire ordinance with Frankfort's. Per a 2007 DEQ rule, no burning is allowed within 1,400 feet of any municipality, except by local ordinance. Frankfort imposes a \$20 annual fee for recreational burning (cookouts, etc. only; no burning of brush or construction materials); burn areas must meet size restrictions and be within reach of a hose. A recent illegal burning incident in the Village prompted Luxford's visit. The Village imposes a \$50 fine for illegal burning. The money goes into the fire fund. No burning of any kind is permitted on Elberta Beach. Diane Jenks asked whether designated fire pits could be

permitted on Elberta Beach. Luxford said yes, but advised against it, citing the enormous response cost if the dunes are set ablaze. Matt Stapleton asked who enforces our beach-fire ordinance; Luxford said the DNR, Fire Department, and/or Sheriff's office.

Chad Hollenbeck, operations manager of the Benzie Bus, said that in five years, the bus has gone from 40K rides per year to about 70K. All funding comes from the millage and from federal funds, not from local general funds. The Benzie Transit Authority saves the county money by performing maintenance at cost on local heavy equipment (fire, EMS), work that used to be sent downstate. Kelly Thayer of the bus Friends Group remarked that the bus is full three times a week with Benzie dialysis and cancer patients traveling to TC.

County Commissioner Marcia Stobie reported that owing to decreasing population, she and Don Tanner have been reapportioned into the same district. Ron Burns has been hired as director of the new dedicated 911 dispatch facility. The commissioners are in communication with the Maples

board regarding legal issues raised by Thelma Rider-Novak. County revenues are predicted at about 25K less this year. A search is on to fill the new county administrator position.

Village expenses of \$30,420.90 (general) and \$11,057.39 (payroll) were approved with one nay vote and no discussion.

Flow at BLUA is lower because of necessary sewer system upgrades. The budget may need amending but fees will not go up. The City of Frankfort wants to use some vacant BLUA property for a tree nursery, and this was generally agreed to by BLUA. The nursery could also serve Elberta.

Linda Manville of Parks and Rec reported that Michele Cannart of the Arts Council proposes having artists create benches around town; about \$50 would be spent on cement slabs, but other costs could be covered by sponsorship. New farmers market guidelines will deter nonfarmer vendors, and vendor fees are up. The farmers market hours are extended till 1 pm. The Solstice Festival is set for June 18. The Council will investigate costs and liability involved in removing the marina park docks. Reinstating a sign noting an honor-system use fee for the boat launch was discussed.

The court has ruled in favor of the Village and denied former Village employee David Hoogerhyde's petition to receive unemployment payments.


A public hearing will be held on May 19 regarding a variance for the new house to be placed on Jerry Little's property. The house is 720 sq. ft. and our zoning requires 800 sq. ft.; plus a minimum lot size of 12K sq. ft., which effectively means that no Villager can rebuild on his or her lot in the event of catastrophe.

Kelli Stapleton wants to create an unincorporated area called the Kingdom of Heaven (see "Highway to Heaven," p. 6), which she said would involve no legal or administrative expenses. The mayor of Hell, MI, a.k.a. "the devil himself," who vacations here, is willing to come before the council to offer advice.

Scott Gest said the first phase of the waterfront development project, east of the park, will take 5-7 years from start of construction, with the rest of the development projected at 25-30 years. Gest remarked that tax revenue from the first phase alone will be enough to solve the Village's financial woes. "With the size of the investment we have in the village, I can guarantee you it's not a dead project," Gest said. "We can tread water as long as we need to until it turns around." Ψ

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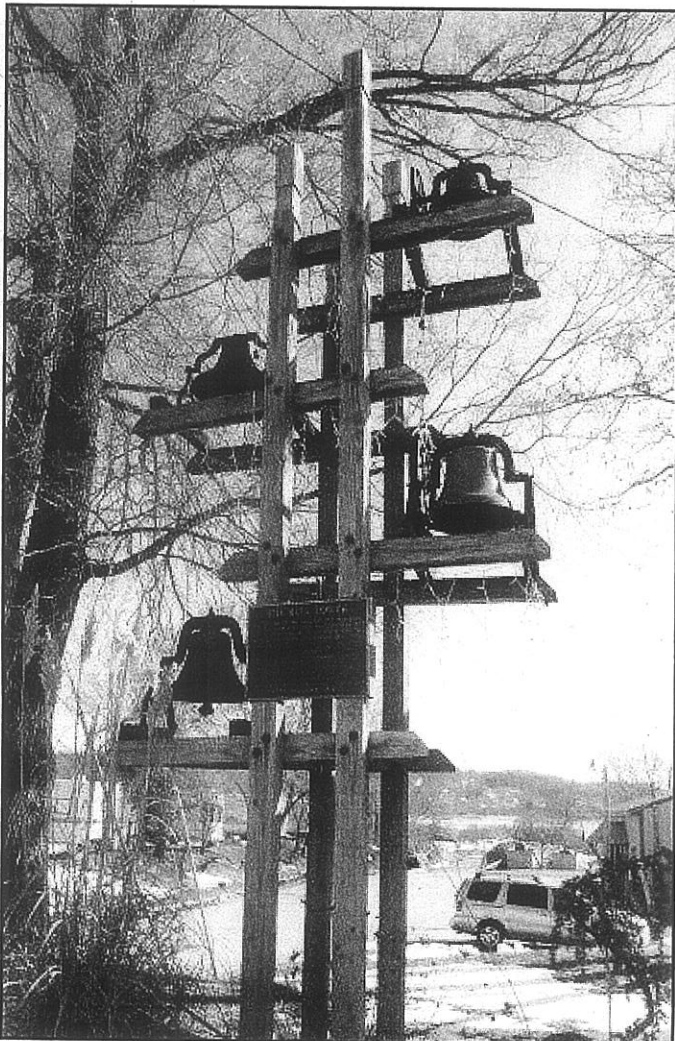
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## Remember When ... With Ken

★ Portrait by Art Melendez



Each issue, Ken Holmes gives us an Elberta history lesson. This month, he schooled Jinx Jenks on the bell tower.



The bell tower stands proud next to the old library—a fitting spot for honoring educators. Four schools once served Gilmore Township: Raymond School, built in 1868, at the corner of White and Valley Streets; Grace District School (1879, at Grace and Forrester Rd.); Elberta School (1870, George M. and Steele St.); and Corner Grove School (1895, M-22 and Grace Rd.). According to Ken, the tower has been redone three times at its present location. The tower, built "by the people for the people," serves as a great big thank-you to for the teaching, mentoring, counseling, and love given to our children. I love the premise, inscribed on the plaque, of teachers and parents working together as a team. Perhaps we should take a few steps backwards and regain that thought process. The library no longer houses great books of mystery and romance, but the tower reminds us of the heroes of the past. When you pass this monument, take a moment to say thanks to all who educate, some by teaching, some by sharing knowledge, and all who teach by example.—Diane "Jinx" Jenks

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PLAQUE DONATED BY THE THOMAS FAMILY IN MEMORY OF  
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Photographs by Diane Jenks

**OOPS: Ted Carland, not Carlin, was partially responsible for the Sleeping Bear Dunes, and he never actually lived in the Village, though he did have business interests here. We regret the error!**

# RAY FRANZ

## Poor Kids in the Spin Cycle: Deunionizing Day Care

By Eric Pyne

OUR STATE HOUSE representative, Ray Franz (R-101st District), has introduced three bills in Lansing. The first was a law to declare June 8 "Remember the USS *Liberty* Day," honoring the U.S. spy ship that was torpedoed by Israeli forces during the Six-Day War of 1967. What really happened to that ship is still a matter of controversy, but 34 American sailors were killed. Another new law that Mr. Franz has asked for would prohibit the building of wind generators offshore in Lake Michigan.

It's the third piece of legislation, House Bill 4157, that requires deciphering. The bill states that employees paid by government subsidy are

not public employees. This bill was prompted by the unionizing of day-care workers into Child Care Providers Michigan, a statewide union begun in 2006. The stated intention of the bill is to repair the injustice done by the formation of this union, and save day-care workers the 1.15% of their income that has been going to union dues. In effect, however, the bill would mean that the people who take care of Michigan's poorest children are not eligible for membership in a public workers union. The same law would make it illegal for teachers to go on strike, although they could still protest as long as it doesn't interfere with their teaching. The bill also "prohibits elections for, or recognition of, a public employer bargaining unit that consists of non-public employees." In the case of day care, that means that unless day-care workers receive all their income through state funds, they cannot join a public union. Most day-care workers take kids who receive subsidies as well as kids whose parents pay out of pocket, so the effect of the bill would

be to make it very unlikely that any day-care workers could legally join a public union.

I spoke with a couple of Elberta day-care providers about their work, and found out that day-care businesses in Elberta are not making it. According to the Great Start Regional Resource Center, there is now *no* licensed day care in the whole village. Day-care business owners report that the system for getting paid by welfare has gotten to be too much of a hassle relative to the money they get. Not only do the workers have to go online to record the hours they spend taking care of subsidized kids, but the parents have to go online too. That can be a problem for parents who are trying to work two jobs or don't have home internet access.

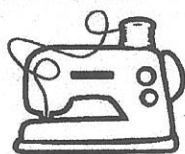
If there is one certain thing it is that our children are our brightest hope for the future. How well a nation cares for its children is a measure of that nation's standing in the world and an indicator of its destiny. While Ray Franz is on the state GOP website congratulating day-care workers on

no longer having to pay union dues, there is also a concerted media campaign to make that seem like a good thing. The Mackinac Center for Public Policy (MCP) is a multimillion-dollar-a-year effort to advance the agenda of some of Michigan's richest people, and they are all over this issue. The teachers' union (MEA) sued the MCP to find out who was giving them money, but the State Appeals court threw out the case in 2004. It was the MCP that sued the Department of Human Services to make that department stop collecting dues from day-care workers. The language in Franz's bill might as well have been taken directly from the MCP's lawsuit. And that causes this reporter to wonder who really writes Franz's legislation.

The controversy obscures the cold cash facts of how little day-care workers get paid. The State of Michigan provides the poorest parents with subsidy payments for day care. Those payments used to amount to \$1.60

continues on page 5

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# MAY

The Elberta Collins Drug Store is adding a soda fountain.... A baseball game in Elberta Park will be held in June—Elberta vs. Arcadia, admission 25 cents for men, 10 cents for ladies and children. The Blaine Independents team is purchasing a tent for future baseball games in Elberta. ("Indoor baseball is the most practical after all," they said.)  
*The Elberta Alert*, May 24, 1912

Date	Event	Details	Location	Time
3	PLANNING AND ZONING MEETING SPECIAL ELECTION	Planning and Zoning Committee regular meeting Gilmore Twp residents vote on millage renewal for Benzie Bus	Village Community Bld., 401 First St. Elberta Library, 704 Frankfort Ave.	7 pm (first Tuesdays) 7 am - 8 pm
4	PARKS & REC MEETING	Regular meeting of the Village Parks and Recreation Committee	Village Community Bld., 401 First St.	7 pm (first Wednesdays)
5, 19	THEMED DINNERS AT THE MAYFAIR TAVERN	Mexican Cuisine, for Cinco de Mayo; Wines of Spain Dinner	The Mayfair Tavern, 515 Frankfort Ave.	6:30 pm. Call 231-360-8292 to reserve.
6	MASTER PLAN MEETING	Master Plan Committee regular meeting with Sarah Lucas of NMCoG	Elberta Library, 704 Frankfort Ave.	8 am (first Fridays)
10	BENZIE GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY GROW BENZIE WORKSHOP: EXTENDING THE GROWING SEASON GILMORE TOWNSHIP MEETING	First meeting of the Benzie Area Genealogical Society, at the Historical Museum. Learn about your family history and local history. "Seed Saving" workshop presented by Craig Schaaf and potluck dinner. How to harvest and store seeds for future use. \$7 suggested donation for individual, \$10 for family/couple. Regular meeting of the board of Gilmore Township.	6941 Traverse Ave., Benzonia 5885 M-115 Frankfort Hwy, Benzonia Elberta Library, 704 Frankfort Ave.	2 pm (second Tuesdays) 5:30 pm - 8:30 pm; 882-9801 7 pm (second Tuesdays)
13-14, 21, 28	MUSIC EVENTS AT THE CABBAGE SHED	Two nights of Rootstand; local boys the Subprime Blues Band; then Scottish folksters Northsea Gas open for Blue Dirt	Cabbage Shed, 198 Frankfort Ave.	8 pm; call 352-0225 info
14	SPRING CLEANUP	Get rid of truckloads of refuse at the rate of \$25 per truckload at the Village Dumpster. For details call 352-7201.	Village Garage, 151 Pearson St.	9 am - 2 pm
19	VILLAGE COUNCIL MEETING	Regular meeting of the Village Council	Village Community Bld. 401 First St.	7 pm (third Thursdays)
21	COMMUNITY DINNER	Community Dinner at Elberta's best church, Elberta United Methodist. Good free food and fellowship.	555 Lincoln Ave.	4 pm-6 pm (third Saturdays)
26	PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE MEETING	Open meeting with Sheriff Rory Heckmann to discuss county security issues. At the Benzie County Sheriff's Office.	505 S. Michigan Ave., Beulah	6 pm (fourth Thursdays)
28	GARLIC MUSTARD PULL	The invasive plant garlic mustard threatens native species. Come help remove it from the Dune Park forest. We will meet at the sign on M-22. Visit www.garlic-mustard.org for info.	Elberta Dunes Park	10 am - 12 pm

## FOODSTUFFS

### Peeling the onion

#### at the Mayfair

By Kathryn denHeeten

I'M NOT THIN. Let's put that out there right off the bat. And I have no plans to become thin. I love good food and drink, and I'm here to share my thoughts on local food, recipes, and other bits and pieces with you, gentle readers of the *Elberta Alert*.

I'll start with my stroll down to the Mayfair Tavern on a recent Friday night. My friend Karen and I were greeted by the ever congenial staff, and I ordered a Guinness, which came nice and cold with a good head of foam. I toured the Guinness brewery a few years back in Dublin and I have to say, if you get the chance to have a pint up at the Gravity Bar with its 360-degree view of the rooftops of Dublin, definitely go for it. If not, have a one at the Mayfair.

But it's the food I was going to talk about. We had plenty of time on our hands, so we started with onion rings. *Oh my*. Not only did they arrive at our table tout de suite, but they were the rings every onion aspires to become. They were delicately crispy, and the batter did not slide off the onion. One eyebrow raised, Karen said, "Now that's an onion ring!" I concurred. Needless to say, we ate every one.

For the main course, Karen had the fish fry and I went with a good old cheeseburger. You can tell when a meal is good when complete silence falls over the table. When silence reigns over two women who rarely clam up, the food is exceptional.

I'm a fan of the Mayfair's cuisine, but another reason I feel at home there is the memories I have of the

#### "WATCH LIST," cont'd

es account for our half million dollar deficit, one that Wilson said, considering our size and revenue, is "probably the worst in the state of Michigan."

In one sense our problem stems from our having paid down our debt; debt payment is considered a governmental expense under a new regulation. We did, however, "turn a corner" last year, Wilson said, reducing our deficit by \$19,000. "Going positive is what's really important. You sold the docominiums [now Betsie Bay Marina, owned by Kris Mills], and you've cut your budget. But you can only cut your budget until you're no longer providing required public services, according to Public Act 4."

We can do little else to cut spending—or generate revenue. Wilson said the Village has few salable assets: we have part of the former Koch proper-

place from my childhood tavern-hopping days with my dad. He actually bartended at Peasoups (as it was called back then—and the name still appears on your debit card statement) after World War II, and it was always one of his favorite haunts.

I spent a lot of time with my dad and his buddies when I was a shy little girl in braids. I distinctly remember sitting at the bar at Peasoups sipping orange soda and eating pickled baloney while the men swapped stories and slapped each other on the back. The jukebox played "The Elusive Butterfly of Love," and never in my life have I felt as safe and secure as I did with my dad, who could do

ty; the public beach area (but not the platted area above the beach, which is owned by Sand Products Corporation); and the sewer plant. Indeed, the Village has already been borrowing from the sewer fund to meet operating expenses.

Wilson suggested that we improve our status in Treasury's eyes by adopting a strategic plan, as Benton Harbor has done. Other than that, we might just wait for the tide to turn and tax revenue from the development to flow. "But the problem is not getting worse," Wilson said. "And that's positive." —*Emily Votruba*

## POTLUCK: GLEANINGS FROM A GROW BENZIE WORKSHOP

"Transplanting Seedlings and Plant Care," Tuesday, April 12

Kaleva farmer Craig Schaaf shared his knowledge of the art of transplanting seedlings with about 35 backyard and larger-scale gardeners. This was the fourth in a series of workshops on extending the growing season. In a hands-on session in the Grow Benzie greenhouse, Craig showed people how to make a "soil block," which enables the young seedling to be transplanted outdoors safely. There was a potluck supper between the hands-on session and the presentation by Mr. Schaaf.

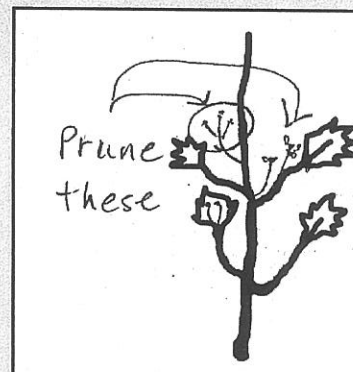
Some of the vegetables discussed were: potatoes, sweet potatoes, carrots, parsnips, onions, beets, cabbage, lettuce, squashes, beans, radishes, cucumbers, turnips, tomatoes, rutabaga, and kohlrabi. Seasonal gardens (early spring, late spring, summer, and fall plantings) were defined and suggestions were made for amending the soil. Schaaf recommends testing your soil to determine whether you need to adjust it to be more acidic or basic, and to determine what nutrients may be lacking. He discussed how to arrange a variety of crops that grow well together in the same plot; for example, tomatoes get along well with basil and onions in the garden, just like they do in our cooking. Petunias interplanted with beans will keep beetles away. And the Native American wisdom of planting corn, squash, and beans all together still applies.

Schaaf strongly suggested using straw to cover the soil after each harvest so that soil nutrients will be preserved. He also offered tips on pruning tomato plants: in a nutshell, remove so-called suckers (small outgrowths of leaves and flower buds) in between leader branches of the plant (see illustration). This will keep the plant growing tall and sturdy, sending its energy to the strongest branches, for bigger, better fruit and disease prevention.

The next workshop, "Seed Saving," will be given at Grow Benzie on May 10th from 6:30 to 9. In June they will offer an all-day workshop on "Building a Hoop House" (date and times to be announced).

Grow Benzie is a community-run farmstead located at 5885 M-115 in Benzonia, dedicated to enriching the lives of children and all Benzie County residents through education about agriculture, nutrition and life skills.

—Mary Link



Here's Schaaf's recipe for a nutritious soil mixture for starting seeds indoors:

30 quarts peat moss, well sifted with a 1/4-inch screen (very important that it be broken down)  
25 quarts of compost  
15 quarts of leaf mold  
10 quarts of perlite  
1 cup of green sand  
1 cup of rock phosphate  
1 cup of blood meal or feather meal  
1 cup of kelp  
1/2 cup of lime

ILLUSTRATION BY MARY LINK

anything, even fight a war and come home to the little town he loved.

That's all for now. Next month: A Trio of Reubens and "Is that man Zorro?"

Ψ

Kathryn denHeeten grew up in Elberta and comes back as often as possible. She works at the Tribal College in Mt. Pleasant, where she advises students and does a bunch of other stuff.

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# LAND, HO!

## Village set to acquire more open space

By Liz Padalino

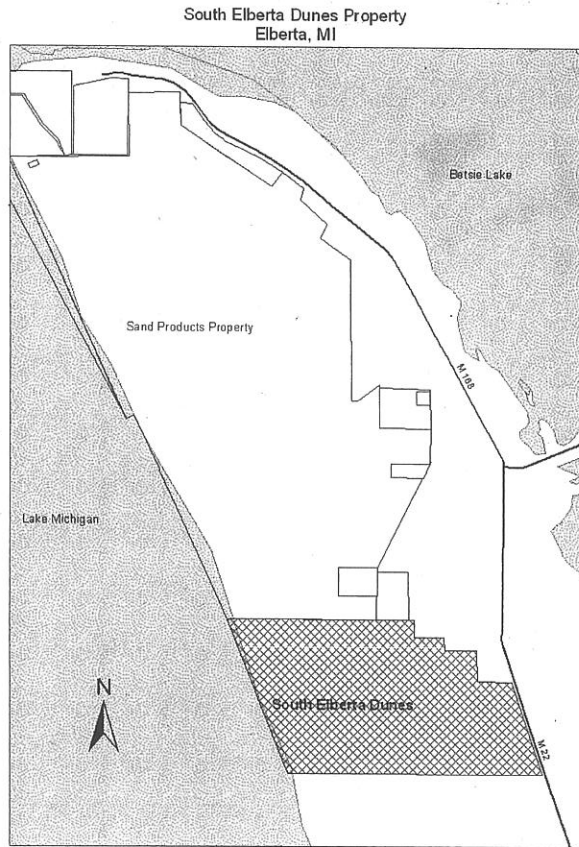
THIS SPRING, THE VILLAGE of Elberta will take over ownership of the South Elberta Dunes property, located just south of Elberta on M-22. Legally protected to ensure public recreational use, the parcel will add yet another park to Elberta's impressive list of public land. It's hoped that this property, at one time part of a larger cabbage farm, will once again stock the Cabbage Shed and other local businesses. But instead of cabbages, this time around we are hoping for people.

In June 2007, six weeks before his death, Jim Thorpe, who owned the property, met with the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy to discuss permanent protection of his land for public recreational use. For a bargain price of \$1,515,000 (\$315,000 below market value), and with Thorpe's blessing, the Land Conservancy bought the land in 2008 with the intention of passing it on to the Village. The Conservancy then secured the money, through the Michigan Natural Resources Trust, for the Village to purchase the land.

Though fully funded with a grant

and fundraising by the Conservancy, the property does not come without a cost. "There are pros and cons," says Sharyn Bower, Village clerk. "It will be a beautiful addition to the Village, but we're already floundering. We're going to lose those taxes, too." Village revenues on the Thorpe property amounted to about \$3,800 annually. The village has very few options for future development, and this property, now out of reach to developers, will never again contribute to the tax base. But it will contribute to preserving the character and quality of life here in Elberta, known for its stunning natural features such as undeveloped dunes and pristine lakeshore open to the public.

Paths mown into a ten acre meadow weave their way to the start of a rugged trail that zigzags its way up the backside of the dune, which towers 225 feet over Elberta. The whole parcel covers a total of 58 acres. On the way to the top, you pass through forested and open dunes, home to wildlife such as red fox, porcupine, long-tail weasel, deer, and coyote. In the spring, look



At press time the sale was still pending because of a requirement that mineral rights be guaranteed to the state. In the meantime, with help from the Conservancy, the Village will create a management plan to set rules for use and build low-impact public features such as a picnic area, parking, trailhead, bike racks, and restrooms. Motorized activities such as snowmobiling and off-road vehicles won't be permitted, because this leads to erosion and destruction of dune plants.

Whatever the future has in store for Elberta, out of these uncertain times comes one guarantee: we will have the land. Ψ

Liz Padalino founded the Frog and Toad Enthusiasts of Northwest Michigan. She lives in Frankfort.

MAP BY LIZ PADALINO

### REP RAP: RAY FRANZ, cont'd

for wild leeks and spring ephemeral wildflowers in the forest. Watch out for poison ivy, which grows rampant here. Hikers who reach the top of the dune, already breathless, will be greeted with a breathtaking panorama of the Betsie River winding through the valley to the east, and on clear days, a south view stretching all the way to Manistee.

per child per hour. Under Governor Snyder's new budget, that amount will be reduced to \$1.35 per child per hour. That is a 16% pay cut being handed to people who are already often working below the poverty line, a poor return on getting out of paying union dues. These are the people we trust with stimulating the minds of our littlest citizens, while their parents work.

On March 1, DHS director Maura Corrigan announced the dissolution of the Michigan Home-Based Child Care Council, the interlocal that made the day-care workers union possible. She thereby nullified the day-care portion of Franz's bill, and he was quite happy about it. A quote on his website reads: "I congratulate day care workers on recapturing the income that is rightfully theirs. Now I'm hopeful we can continue work on the legislation that will protect other private employees from going through the same circumstances as the day care workers did." Ψ

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Grown the Way God Intended

Eric Pyne is a green contractor, community activist, and yogi. Contact him at ericpyne.com. Rep Rap explores how elected officials affect our community. Submit ideas or essays to PO Box 357, Elberta, MI 49628 or elberta.alert@gmail.com

# BLAST From the FUTURE!

## Highway to Heaven

By Merren Garber

I RECENTLY ATTENDED my first council meeting (April 21), and one of the proposals really stuck out to me. It was from Mrs. Stapleton. At first she wanted to rename the entire town of Elberta "Heaven." But she changed her mind and proposed just naming the M-168 area Heaven. I mean, at first I thought the proposal was pretty strange, but as Mrs. Stapleton continued talking about it, I started thinking it was brilliant. Renaming M-168, which has to be changed when the highway is given over to the Village anyway, and call-

ing it Highway to Heaven, would be an attraction to bring money into Elberta. Since Elberta actually is pretty poor, why not?

I interviewed Mrs. Stapleton after the council meeting. I asked her what kids in Elberta could do to help out with her idea. She mentioned cleaning pennies and scattering them on the sidewalk along the highway and in the parks, and having a wishing well full of pennies from "Heaven." Who wouldn't want pennies from Heaven? She said we could make gift bags with halo tiaras for brides who get married at the Lifesaving Station to remember their marriage made in Heaven. I think the scenic lookout should have a sign that says "Gateway to Heaven," because that's pretty much what you see when you look straight out and up into the



sky.

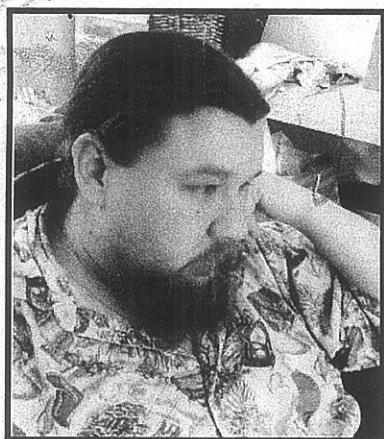
So many possibilities for Elberta attractions come out of Mrs. Stapleton's idea. We can improve the many parks we have, and put up new Village signs, and have a more detailed website for the Village

with more links to businesses. The railroad and the ferries are gone, the peaches are gone. Elberta needs something to be known for again to get more people to visit. With the Highway to Heaven, tourists will want to come here and maybe spend some money.

I think it's a great idea. What about you? Do you have any ideas to put this town on the map?

If you do, you can e-mail my mom, Jennifer Wilkins, who is a member of the Parks and Rec Commission and the Elberta Arts Council, at [smilnjen10@yahoo.com](mailto:smilnjen10@yahoo.com). Ψ

*Alert editor Merren Garber attends Frankfort-Elberta High School.* PHOTO BY JENNIFER WILKINS



## Bluegill and Galaga

By Patrick J. McConnell

SOME OF MY EARLIEST memories of Elberta are of visiting my grandfather Arthur "Pat" McConnell every weekend. He would pick me up from school in Traverse City and take me to the mall. We'd grab a bite to eat and head west out of town with the sun in our eyes. Elberta was a little bit different then.

I would spend my time playing up on the dunes, in the back yard, or sometimes I would just hang around my grandpa's plumbing shop checking out the seemingly endless array of pipes, fittings, and fixtures. Everything seemed so much bigger back then, including my grandfather.

Kids had a ton of things to do

around here. I hiked the trails over the dune to Elephant Valley—as my granddad called it—all the way down the beach, up the other part of the hill, back through town, and home. I remember going to buy groceries at Thomas's store, back when there was a butcher shop along the back wall. I'd see the same two old-timers sitting on the bench just inside the door, watching the world slowly roll by.

Every couple of months I would go down to Mix's barbershop with my granddad to get our hair cut. Well, I was getting mine cut, anyway. He didn't have much hair. I would sit and wait my turn while the old boys would swap the same old stories and talk about how well the Detroit Tigers were doing. The atmosphere of the barbershop was almost hypnotic.

One summer the library downtown was selling jigsaw puzzles for a nickel apiece. I bought several armloads and spent all summer either doing jigsaw puzzles (some of the pieces were missing) or riding my bike down to the ice cream shop to wage an endless war with the Galaga game. Sometimes I wonder how many quarters I shoveled into that machine.

Elberta is a sportsman's paradise. I remember catching perch, steelhead, pike, bullheads, bluegill, and salmon. My cousin converted an old refrigerator into a smoker and smoked fish all the time. We'd fish all year

round—off the pier, on the river, or through the ice. It didn't matter; they always seemed to be biting. Sometimes we'd take the boat out on the lake when it wasn't too rough.

Every year around Christmas my cousin and my aunt would come up from Texas, later over from Wyoming, to visit. That meant it was time to drag out the old snowmobiles and race around the field just south of town. After spending what seemed like forever (I could be an impatient kid at times) the old sleds would at last fire up and off we'd go. It was always worth the wait.

As I sit here writing this it occurs to me that, at this particular period in time, the Village of Elberta in many ways has one foot in the world of the past and one in the seemingly limitless possibilities of the future. People from many different places have come to discover and appreciate this little northern Michigan jewel. I feel extremely lucky to have spent such a big piece of my childhood here. I may sometimes forget where I put my keys, my wallet, or, heaven forbid, my phone, but I'll never forget this place. Ψ

*Patrick J. McConnell lives in Mt. Pleasant, and will graduate in May with an associate's degree in Liberal Arts from Saginaw Chippewa Tribal College. He plans to pursue an English degree at Central Michigan University in the fall.*

PHOTO BY KATHRYN DENHEETEN

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