



Reflecting on changing businesses in a changing town

By Julie Zapoli
Sun contributor

When I look out my shop window on Western Avenue in downtown Glen Arbor, in one direction I can see oak trees and pine trees old enough that they've started to lean a little, and cabin-style buildings that flood when the snow melts too quickly in the spring because the sidewalks have sunken with age. In the other direction is the iconic Art's Tavern—which might possibly be visible from outer space with its seasonal light display—and across the street from Art's is a small green box that has been a bakery and a pop-up and is now an artist's studio.

There's a field next to the Post Office where two deer graze in the warm sunshine—the same two deer everyone in town has gotten to know and feed this past winter, sometimes tossing apples to them in the garden behind Inn and Trail Gourmet. The building where we have our gourmet food market was previously a clothing store, and speciality

food shop before that, and a video store, and Grocer's Daughter Chocolate shop, and a real estate office whose proprietor at one time had to implore the bartender at Art's to run over at 2 a.m. each winter night before closing to throw a log into the wood stove so they wouldn't get hypothermia while working the next morning.

It's hard for anyone to pinpoint exactly when a town changes. Most of the time we're too busy with our daily life to notice the subtle transformations. Living in one place prohibits noticing much beyond our typical path, but we adjust: a clothing shop becomes a food market, the old school house becomes a vacation rental, a bed and breakfast changes hands after 23 years. The Glen Arbor Bed and Breakfast, which was purchased earlier this year by Michael Aragon, was originally built as a boarding house 150 years ago for the loggers who came to northern Michigan to cut timber. Some of that Michigan timber

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Glen Lake Restaurant Week returns

From staff reports

Glen Lake Restaurant Week—Friday, April 28, until Saturday, May 6—offers an array of dining options “from French Fries to French Cuisine.” Each establishment will offer a mouthwatering prix-fixe menu. Participating restaurants include: Art's Tavern, Blu, Cherry Public House, Funistrada, Good Harbor Grill, Inn & Trail Gourmet, La Bécasse, Nonna's Italian Ristorante and Western Avenue Grill. To learn more and view menus, visit Facebook.com/eatglenarbor.



Photo by Jenny Elyse Bremer
Water and light dance together during a Lake Michigan sunset following an early April storm with gail-force winds.

Through cancer and trips to war, the White family marches on

By Jacob Wheeler
Sun editor

The train leaves the Polish station heading east at 8:30 a.m. on a rainy April 9. The carriages are packed with women and children who waited patiently for hours in a line that wrapped around the station and into a nearby neighborhood. The cold dampness pierces their clothing, but they are anxious to visit and spend Easter in Ukraine with their husbands, fathers, and sons who they haven't seen in many months.

The train soon crosses the border. Soldiers hop on and ride to the next stop while checking passports and documents. The passengers are returning to their embattled nation that for nearly 14 months has withstood the Russian invaders. These rails, so central to the Ukrainian war experience, have carried diplomats, generals, presidents, and many supplies into Kyiv, and during the early months of the war they took millions of refugees in the other direction.

On this Easter Sunday, the train is carrying North Carolina Speaker of the House Tim Moore (Republican) and his escort, Leelanau County resident Bo White who knows these rails and roads into Ukraine. A former Air Force pararescueman, Bo has done contract work for the State Department and several humanitarian nonprofits since he officially left the U.S. military, this is his fourth trip to Ukraine since the war began on Feb. 24, 2022.

Most famously, he and a former Special Forces buddy helped rescue critically wounded Fox News reporter Benjamin Hall from a Ukrainian hospital in mid-March 2022 and evacuate him to Poland, from where he was airlifted to a U.S. Army hospital in Germany. Hall



L: a sunflower planted in front of a bombed building in Kharkiv, Ukraine. R: Forrest celebrates with his sister, Finley, and parents, Nicole and Bo White, after he was declared cancer free.



recently told his story in a best-selling book titled *Saved: A War Reporter's Mission to Make it Home*. Traveling in

a vehicle that came under fire outside

See WHITE on page 4



Photo by Beau Warren

Brooke, 11, springs for joy on a beautiful Easter Sunday, April 9, at Empire Bluff.

Nittolos eat Italy and Spain, bring tapas home to Lake Leelanau

By Jacob Wheeler
Sun editor

Part of a series about influencers in the local culinary scene, and what inspires them.

When most of us travel to Europe, we savor an exquisite meal or two, we have an extra glass of wine, we go for an evening stroll, and we sleep soundly.

When Eric Nittolo, owner of Nittolo's Seafood & Pizza in Lake Leelanau, travels to Europe—as he has done a couple times since the last busy tourism season in northern Michigan—he brings a family entourage and they eat like royalty, night after night. With each

plate, in each city, Eric challenges himself to learn something new, to bring culinary lessons home to Lake Leelanau.

Last December he took eight of his children on a 13-day tour of Italy. They began in the north in Milan, where the menu is influenced by French cuisine, then moved onto Venice, Florence and Rome. Though the accompanying crew ranged in age from 25 to Eric's 4-year-old son Maximo, they went out to eat at 10 p.m., as southern Europeans do, and those in the family old enough to drink would consume two bottles of Prosecco and four-six bottles of wine during each meal.

See NITTOLO on page 6

Glen Arbor's Little Free Art Gallery brings art to the masses

By Katie Dunn
Sun contributor

There is a phenomenon—albeit a very small one—sweeping the country, and it has made its way to Glen Arbor: the “Free Little Art Gallery” (FLAG). It was the ingenious idea of Glen Arborite, Michele Aucello, to install one on the grounds of the Glen Arbor Arts Center (GAAC). Founded in May 2021, Aucello branded the micro-gallery: the “Little Free Art Gallery.” Despite the differentiating nomenclature, its purpose and spirit are indistinguishable from that of the countless FLAGS in existence: “Make Art, Take Art, Love Art.”

Presently, GAAC is the only venue in Leelanau County that offers a FLAG, but the concept will likely gain traction. FLAGS are represented in a variety of cities across the United States—Denver, Colorado, to Louisville, Kentucky, to Houston, Texas, and more. Also, the phenomenon is not singular to the United States: Canada, Germany, and Poland, for instance, are also a part of this burgeoning art culture. There even is a website dedicated to directing folks to a FLAG in their area. (findafreelittleartgallery.com)

In a sense, the FLAG phenomenon is meant to redress the notion that the fine arts are elitist or inaccessible. FLAGS are, in essence, very much egalitarian. They make the arts approachable—a safe place for one to self-express. FLAGS also are an anecdote, or alternative, to the stratosphere of Robert Motherwell, Clifford Still, Ellsworth Kelly,

and their contemporaries, whose works were monumental and dominating.

Aucello, formerly on the board of the GAAC and an admitted aesthete, was inspired by a FLAG that was already in existence in nearby Benzie County. Her aim was to draw attention to the GAAC campus itself, and it was thought that a FLAG would be useful in that regard. Aucello also wanted to provide an outlet for artistic creativity and a place for art appreciation.

“A few years ago, when I was on the GAAC Board, we were brainstorming about how to attract people back to the property since it is kind of hidden from the road (Lake Street). Flags or banners, perhaps, along the walkway? I mentioned a free little library, but someone pointed out that Glen Arbor already had three—at Blu, Thompson’s Inn across the street from [Anderson’s Market], and one on Northwood Drive (Annabel Cochran Moore). It must have been a year or two later when COVID hit, and we were working on the Outdoor Gallery—discussing pop-ups to be held outside and watching what other art organizations were doing to promote art safely. I saw that the Oliver Art Center in Benzie had a Little Free Art Gallery. I could not believe I had not thought of it myself! I contacted the Oliver Art Center to see if they would mind if we copied the idea. They said the more the merrier,” Aucello explained.

Aucello enlisted local carpenters from the Traverse City Man Shed to construct the pint-size museum. Set in the grove area of the GAAC, the FLAG

is a simple wooden box that stands on a pedestal and is clad in bright red paint.

“I thought it would pop out,” Aucello recounted. “You can see it from Lake Street. We are always thinking of ways to draw people’s attention to GAAC,” she elaborated.

Initially, the GAAC FLAG was stocked with artwork from Aucello’s bi-monthly “Make A Little Art” group. The first meeting was held out at the Lavender Farm on Bohemian Road in 2021. Aucello brought miniature canvases—3X3—and materials. She invited friends from the Glen Arbor community to sketch or paint whatever they had observed on that particular day. Aucello made “Make A Little Art” kits: baskets containing papers, pens, and markers, and dropped them off at the Cottage Bookstore, Glen Arbor Wines, and the weekly Leelanau Farm-

ers Market behind Glen Arbor Village Hall. Attached to the art kit was a small easel that invited participants to create diminutive masterpieces to keep for their own personal enjoyment or to donate to the GAAC FLAG.

Presently, the GAAC FLAG displays a variety of media, which rotates by theme in accordance with current gallery exhibits or holidays. Other times, the exhibits are themeless—simply whatever the contributing artists feel inclined to create and share. Those who share their creations with the GAAC FLAG range in age, background, and artistic ability. Largely, the works are anonymous contributions by locals or seasonal folks. In addition to the dainty masterpieces, the GAAC FLAG contains figurines which represent visitors, and furniture—such as a bench to sit on for the purpose of

FLAG concludes on page 3



Raion Taiko makes its Manitou Music debut on Saturday, April 29, at 7 pm at the Glen Lake School's indoor auditorium. Feel the heartbeat of the drums pulsing with the moving spirit of the Midwest Taiko arts ensemble Raion Taiko's "sound of thunder drummers," embracing the rhythms of rain and energy of light to create a song on the soundscapes of Japanese Taiko Drumming. The Manitou Music series is a project of the Glen Arbor Arts Center. For information visit GlenArborArt.org.



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Sun wins seven Michigan Press awards for coverage

From staff reports

The *Glen Arbor Sun* won seven awards in five different categories from the Michigan Press Association's Better Newspaper Contest among local news media for stories published between August 1, 2021, and July 31, 2022.

In the Best Opinion category, Mae Stier won first place for her July 3, 2022 story, "Reduced access to abortions, reduced access to freedom."

The *Sun* won three awards in the Business/Agriculture News category: Susan Ager won second place for her December 24, 2021 story, "A passage to India, here in Lake Leelanau"; Madeleine Vedel won third place for her August 19, 2021 story, "What heat waves, frost, drought and torrential rain mean for our cherry orchards," and Jacob Wheeler received an honorable mention for his June 19, 2022 story, "Goats feast at Port Oneida Rural Historic District."

In the Feature Photo category, Stier won third place for her November 14, 2021 photo story, "A tour of the North Manitou Shoal Light Station."

In the Feature story category Kathleen Stocking received an honorable mention for her December 25, 2021, "Looking for God's Infinite Plan in the Footprints of Wolves."

And in the Government/Education

News category, Wheeler won third place for his January 23, 2022 story, "Solving Leelanau's Child Care Crisis: Early

Childhood Development Commission launches innovative home-based business model."



FLAG

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pondering the displayed work.

Essentially, Aucello serves as the informal curator of the FLAG. She surveys the GAAC FLAG throughout the week—tidying up the miniature gallery or adding more artwork when necessary. Aucello soon learned that a bountiful amount of artwork was being dropped off, especially during the busiest weeks of the summer. However, she leans on the year-round "Make A Little Art" groups to stock up in the leaner months.

Aucello's energy and enthusiasm for the FLAG—and the arts, in general—are both abounding and contagious. She and close friend, Darci Ricker of Glen Arbor, host impromptu arts and crafts nights around the Glen Arbor area. Aucello is always prepared with a plentiful supply of materials: paint pens, papers, stones recovered from Sleeping Bear Bay, pinecones, feathers, paintbrushes, and more in hand. Populating these gatherings are other, equally creative, Glen Arborites: Lauren Maxwell, Shelli Martin, Laura Cavender, Sue Church, Kathy Warnes, and Brooke Eddy Hazael-Massieux, to name a few. (I'm known to participate, as well.) These informal events are very much spirited, unifying and sustaining for those who participate.

"I look forward to the craft nights every time they're scheduled! Especially

in the cold months—there's something so cozy and communal about getting together and crafting. Total hygge vibes. As someone who is pretty new to full-time living in Glen Arbor, they've been a great way to meet new people and to get to know neighbors over drinks and laughs," Maxwell, a transplant from neighboring Cedar, shared.

Martin, who likewise is relatively new to the Glen Arbor, concurred with Maxwell that these art gatherings supply a sense of solidarity and solace. "I enjoy these gatherings for companionship. It also pleases me that our collective creativity reaches beyond the group as we often help enhance exhibits at the Glen Arbor Arts Center. Recently, we painted Valentine's decorations for the folks at Maple Valley Assisted Living."

There is an altruistic component to GAAC FLAG: Maple Valley Retirement Home, Glen Lake Schools, and Norte's Kids Summer Camp are some of the beneficiaries of these tiny works of art. The gifted art is a bright light for the retirees, students and campers, alike. Aucello has been instrumental in facilitating and nurturing these relationships between the GAAC and the community—not surprising as she serves as the Deputy Clerk for the Glen Arbor Township. Public service and the arts are her passions.

Aucello is an educator, having re-

ceived her undergraduate degree at the University of Michigan in psychology. From there, she earned her Master of Arts and teaching credentials at the University of California, Berkeley. Aucello then taught first and second grade for 13 years at Epiphany School in Honolulu, Hawaii.

She and her husband, Kevin, decided in 2017 that they would move to Glen Arbor and make it their permanent home. For Aucello, it was an easy transition from life in Hawaii, having grown up in downstate Michigan and summering on the eastern shore of Glen Lake her entire life. They made their summer cottage on Little Glen Lake their year-round home, but retained its original name, "The Best of Both Worlds," as they still maintain a home in Hawaii. (Kevin still travels back and forth from Hawaii each month as his business is based on the islands.)

The GAAC's FLAG still stands as the only one in all of Leelanau County. However, Aucello is convinced that another iteration is bound to surface elsewhere in the county at some point. It appears that FLAGs will continue to multiply in the years to come, so embrace it—make, take, and appreciate a little art!

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WHITE

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Kyiv, Hall was the only survivor of an attack that killed a Fox photojournalist and a Ukrainian journalist. He lost a leg, both feet, and the function of one hand and one eye. Fox aired a special documentary last month about Hall's ordeal and survival.

Bo has helped save many less well-known people, too. He has worked with Save Our Allies—a nonprofit which helps rescue and serve Americans and allies in war-torn environments, and which helped extract thousands from Kabul when Afghanistan fell to the Taliban in August 2021. Bo and others helped evacuate an elderly woman with Multiple Sclerosis from her apartment in Kyiv. As the Russians threatened to encircle the Ukrainian capital in the early days of the war, the woman's caretaker abandoned her. She lacked medication and was probably going to die. Her family in Texas contacted Save Our Allies, and Bo, who was already in the country, responded to the distress call. It took them two days to find her.

"She was like a whole new person," once she received her meds in Poland, following a harrowing 25-hour car ride through checkpoints and bomb-cratered roads, Bo said. "During the trip it was like she was going to murder us. Then she became the sweetest, kindest, most gracious lady!"

During those early weeks of the war, when it looked like the Russians might

seize Kyiv and much of the country, Ukraine's prolific rail network carried millions of refugees to safety in Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania. It was the largest and fastest unfolding refugee crisis in Europe since the Second World War. Women and children under age 18 crossed borders while the men stayed to defend their country. Bo recalled being embraced "with a death grip and tears" by many he helped, both Ukrainian soldiers and civilians fleeing to Poland.

"I don't think I've ever felt more sincere gratitude for work we were voluntarily doing in my whole life, including during my active military duty," said Bo, whose resume of missions includes Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and the Horn of Africa.

Crazy, but honest

There were strange experiences, too, while navigating a foreign culture while under siege. On one trip, Bo and his friend hopped into a car early in the morning in western Ukraine with Viktor, a military chaplain who White described as an "old crusty Soviet who's been around a long time. He eats cigarettes and Coca-Cola for breakfast." They had been told that Viktor spoke English, but the only expression he knew was "God is good." During the long ride into Kyiv, they tried to small talk with Viktor and ask where he was from. "God is good," was all he offered. The chaplain helped the Americans on several missions, "getting supplies in and people out."

At a checkpoint in downtown Kyiv, Viktor suddenly hopped out of the car and disappeared. "Oh great, we're going to get bombed," thought Bo. Everything around them look closed and abandoned. Viktor descended into a basement and reemerged three minutes later with croissants, Cokes and cigarettes. "Cool, man," Bo thought.

"The crazy thing was that people just did what had to be done, in ways that only a resilient person can."

Bo also had to navigate fears that those claiming to be American volunteers were actually Russian spies—allegations potentially spread by the Kremlin's propaganda network to undercut U.S. support for the Ukrainian side. On several occasions during the war's first weeks, Bo and his friends were held at gunpoint while their bags and vehicles were ripped apart at checkpoints.

"We had to be very intentional. We weren't carrying any military stuff," he said. "Early on this was a dangerous place to go without a weapon or body armor, but the danger was actually greater to go in with it, because you'd look suspicious. So we opted not to

(bring anything), and that paid off.

"What kind of idiot would go here carrying no weapon, no body armor, and no medical supplies?" Bo asked rhetorically. "You either have to be crazy, or you are who you say you are."

Bo experienced plenty of warzones before, in the Middle East and Africa, but never one in an industrial, developed city—"like we were in downtown Chicago." He described riding in a vehicle on a three-lane highway west of Kyiv and watching a tank that had just engaged with Russians barrel through the median. Ten seconds later fighter jets and missiles flew overhead. He saw huge blockades made of city buses smashed together to stop the invaders from coming in.

"It was brilliant but also terrible because it stops people from leaving," said Bo. "From a military strategy point of view, this was a fascinating case study on so many fronts."

Forrest battles cancer

Bo White's handshake is a vice grip, but his wife Nicole is just as strong. Together they own Dune Bird Winery, which opened on M-22 north of Leland in late 2021. Nicole, who grew up in Montana, is a licensed real estate agent with Venture Properties, ran a skincare business with Rodan & Fields, and was previously the online editor at *Traverse Magazine*. When she married Bo 15 years ago, Nicole knew she had signed up for a life together with a military guy who would occasionally leave her and go to dangerous places.

"I had just enough of an idea that I couldn't dictate terms," she said. "That lifestyle we led as a young married couple set the stage early on for when our son got a crazy diagnosis that could have easily taken his life."

In December 2017, Bo was in Afghanistan for what Nicole described as "one of the most dangerous missions of his career," and Nicole took their son Forrest, 4, and daughter Finley, 1, back to Montana to spend the holidays with her family. Forrest caught a bad cold and she took him to the hospital. A week before Christmas he was diagnosed with leukemia. An oncologist told Nicole that "if a fluke cold had not brought you in, your son would have died, and you would have been able to do nothing about it."

Bo left Afghanistan immediately and rejoined the family at a children's hospital in Spokane, Washington, where they spent five weeks of hell, pumping experimental steroids and chemotherapy drugs into Forrest. The 28-day induction period was unlike any their oncologist had ever experienced, he told Nicole. The 4-year-old's



Doctors pummeled Forrest's body with chemo and steroids to beat the leukemia.

strength and resilience and ability to withstand the drugs was remarkable.

"They pummeled him way more than adults because their systems are purer and because they can handle it," said Nicole. But after 28 days Forrest had gained nearly 15 pounds, and his body was so weak that his mother had to hold him up to go to the bathroom. "He would wake up throughout the clock screaming, in terror, with 'roid rage'."

Concerned about Forrest's organs failing, the doctors would stop after a month and let his body recover before hammering it again. His immune system was shot, and yet months later the leukemia had not left his bloodstream. The trick was not just to get rid of it, but to keep it gone. Nicole was told that in the 1960s a kid with Forrest's diagnosis would have been dead within three months.

Back in Leelanau County, in the hangar house in Bohemian Valley, which Bo and Nicole had built as their dream house, Forrest continued to battle cancer. It seemed that every single week posed a new, horrible challenge. Once he developed white ulcers in his mouth and was in so much pain that he wouldn't eat or drink for five days. Their visits to Munson Hospital's Cowell Cancer Center in Traverse City were frequent, and Nicole estimated they took an ambulance at least six times from Munson to Devos Children's Hospital in Grand Rapids. All the while, Bo would leave for weeks at a time on dangerous missions overseas.

Forrest's nightmare continued for three and a half years until May 2021, when the team of doctors pronounced him cancer-free. The 7.5-year-old was honored at Devos, and on May 25 he got to ring a ceremonial bell, run through a big banner, and celebrate at an outdoor pig roast with 100 friends and family at the Whites' new home, the land on M-22

WHITE concludes on page 5

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north of Leland which would open later that year as Dune Bird Winery.

“Our life as a military family going through cancer—it teaches you what to pay attention to, what to value, and what to let go,” said Nicole. She and Bo both consider themselves deeply Christian. They owe their resilience in part to their faith. Nicole concedes that here in rural northern Michigan she misses having a military community around her. She struggles when people around her learn of Bo deploying or Forrest’s chemotherapy and tell her, ‘I don’t know how you do that.’

“You don’t have a choice,” she tells herself. “What else are you gonna do? Your son is diagnosed with cancer: are you gonna walk away? ... Ukraine gets attacked. Are you gonna walk away? Or are you gonna rise to the occasion?”

“I’ve always been grateful that I can appreciate my husband, my family, and my life as a gift. It’s not guaranteed. A lot of us pretend that we can be safe. But I’ve never been able to pretend that. I’m grateful for what I have.”

The year 2021 stood out for the White family, and not just because Forrest was diagnosed as cancer-free and because Dune Bird Winery opened in November and instantly became a popular destination in northern Leelanau County—both for wine tasting and for espresso seekers. (Dune Bird was so popular early in 2023 that it ran out of wine and closed for two months.) It was also the first year of Bo and Nicole’s marriage when he didn’t deploy overseas. The family aspired to make enough money with the winery that he wouldn’t have to leave them.

Then on Feb. 24, 2022, Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which instantly became the largest European war in 77 years. The calls for Bo’s help came immediately, and he hopped on a plane four days later.

“In one sense Daddy being in and out is all they’ve ever known,” Nicole described how their children reacted to Bo’s most recent deployments. “But 2021 was a year of everyone settling into each other, then to say goodbye to Daddy again was harder. We had to learn it all over again, and do our separate thing again.

“We talk about Daddy helping people,” she added. “We go back and forth on whether Facetime is helpful or hurtful (for the kids). Sometimes it’s helpful, sometimes it throws things all off.”

Political support for Ukraine

In the beginning, Ukraine needed medical supplies, aid, and weapons, and vulnerable people like the woman with MS needed help getting out of the country. Now the mission of Bo



Refugees on the move in Ukraine.

and other volunteers with prior U.S. military experience is different. What Ukraine needs now is continued political support from the West.

“In a war zone you have to adapt and understand how to help people. My role now is different than what it was early on,” said Bo. “We’re still pushing supplies, but the bigger thing is to help inform a narrative that the people of Ukraine are in a humanitarian crisis. My best use right now is carrying a representative [like North Carolina’s Tim Moore] who can engage with military and government officials in Kyiv, and show Ukrainian leaders that they’re not forgotten about, that we’ve still got their backs.”

Bo conceded that he didn’t like the “war tourism feeling, but unfortunately it’s also a necessary part of keeping the efforts, in our case the humanitarian side, at the forefront of people’s minds and in the narrative back home.”

As the packed train rumbled east toward Kyiv, Bo looked out the window and saw towns pass by that resembled relics of the Soviet Union—buildings with grey, bland, harsh surfaces, stone and cracked cement exposing brick with virtually no color. Once in a while he saw cobblestone streets with touches of modern amenities, including street lights, small grocery stores and coffee shops that sell baked goods and cigarettes. Everyone here seemed to smoke. And everyone seemed to have too much luggage, with strollers and worn bags stuffed with what looked like their entire belongings. Yet the line of people boarding the train at the station was calm and organized, unlike anything Bo had experienced in such a large group. Nobody cut in line, nobody spoke loudly. He perceived a somber, unspoken unity.

Bo and State Rep. Moore sat in car 8. They had brought plenty of snacks for the 10-hour ride to Kyiv, but Bo wanted to stretch his legs and walked forward eight cars to buy a hot dog in the on-board cafe. He waited 20 minutes in line for “basically a gas station hot dog, but it was delicious,” he said. Instead of a bun, the Ukrainians use a baguette with a hole on one end and the hot dog in the middle, kind of like a corn dog. Bo survived on these hot dogs and energy

bars during his earlier trips to Ukraine.

“They’re not healthy but they fit our ‘eat, sleep and pee whenever you can’ strategy. You never know when it’ll be your last chance.”

During the trip, Bo didn’t hear a single child cry, a person laugh, or any boisterous conversation. During his walk through the train he didn’t see a single smile. “I don’t think it’s all about the war,” he said. “It’s cultural, too. This is a beautiful people, rich with tradition and whose expression is different than ours. They’re more matter of fact. No frills. They are stoic, confident and boasting an underlying pride. They are the toughest people I have ever met.”

Back at his seat in car 8, a mother with red dyed hair, along with her eight-year-old son, sitting behind Bo and Rep. Moore made sandwiches and filled the air with the smell of cold cut sausage, a common aroma in Ukraine.

Bo later met Ana, a Ukrainian woman in her late 20s who switched seats so the State House Speaker’s party could sit together. Bo learned that she was a journalist in Kyiv when the war broke out and fled to Germany. She hadn’t seen her husband since March 2, 2022, and she was traveling home to spend five days with him.

“It made me so emotional,” said Bo. “I slipped her \$100 and told her to please treat her husband to a nice meal in town. She cried and thanked us. It was all I could do and it felt so trivial and small, but I felt so moved to say and do something for her to know we support her and hear her.”



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NITTOLO

continues from page 1

They ate pasta carbonara in every city, but the noodles varied based on the region of Italy. They ate a swordfish carpaccio dish that Eric said a health department in the United States would never allow. They ate octopus salad. They ate caviar. They ate fabulous desserts. They ate memorable pizzas, both

in white linen restaurants and in a tiny espresso bar in Venice. A mortadella pizza in Milan reminded Eric of his childhood growing up in New Jersey. And he noticed that good pizzas there cost 19 Euros.

“America has had it too cheap for too long going out to eat,” he reflected. “A \$6 pizza shouldn’t exist. You can charge that little because there are no food quality laws here.”

Every night Eric took mental notes on how he could incorporate these culinary lessons back home. Now at Nittolo’s in Lake Leelanau you can order a Tuscan wild boar pizza served with smoked mozzarella.

“We’re taking our flavors more traditional more old-school Italian,” said Eric. “I have steered the rudder here to be more traditional, even though I’m classically French trained.”

Eric, whose great grandparents left Avellino in southern Italy and passed through Ellis Island, grew up on Long Island with his grandmother before moving with his father to New Jersey. Because the immigrants immediately became “American,” no one spoke Italian in the home, but Italian food was everywhere in their neighborhood.

The Nittolos visited Rome last Christmas but found the Vatican and the Coliseum closed. By then they had tired of eating Italian food, so they feasted on sushi instead, washed down with champagne.

Back in Lake Leelanau, Eric doesn’t want to be pigeonholed as solely an Italian chef, but he’s also willing to play to his popularity.

“My goal is not to turn this solely into an Italian restaurant. Unfortunately, we don’t have the voice to say what we are. The diners tell us what we are. And the diners say we’re an Italian restaurant.”

The family adventure in December inspired Eric to add 57 more Italian wines to the menu. He tallied more than 100 hours researching and writing the restaurant’s new wine list. He also revamped the menu and gave it a trial run for New Year’s Eve. The changes were subtle. “Don’t shock the customers,” Eric told himself.

Bit by the travel bug, in March Eric returned to southern Europe together with his son Maximo and daughter Francesca—this time journeying to Lisbon, Sevilla, Barcelona, Valencia, and Mallorca to glean inspiration for a Spanish Tapas lounge that Nittolo’s will open on May 17. (Tapas will be available Sunday-Thursday in the lounge; the member’s speakeasy club resumes on Fridays and Saturdays).

Nittolo’s Tapas will be available for \$6-11 apiece. The small plates menu that launches on May 17 will include: a salmon and scallop tartare, fried potatoes, date salad, croquette, mussels, octopus, oxtail, prawn, sea bass, assorted cheeses, calamari, jamon ibérico, and paella, as well as crusted bread with tomato puree and olives—to go with an assortment of Spanish wines and Sangria.

“My whole motto is, ‘Give them what they expect in a way they least expect it.’”

Eric hopped over to Luzerne and Zurich, Switzerland, before flying back to the Midwest in late March, but he wasn’t ready to settle into the slow grind just yet. He and Maximo picked up Angelina and Vincent and flew to Finland, where they ate their way through the Baltic capitals and nibbled in Scandinavia. They saw Helsinki, Riga and Tallinn, and finished the trip with street hotdogs in Copenhagen.

“My travel reset me internally. I travel to make my insides right,” said Eric, who came away as impressed by the local food as he was by the spirit of the people he met. The independent spirit of the Latvians, who have been free of the Russian boot for only a few decades; the courtesy of the Swiss, who would stop a 10-ton train for pedestrians waiting to cross the track, the pride of the Estonians, who boast colorful fruit markets erected inside inauspicious tin sheds.

After this busy season in Lake Leelanau, Eric said he wants to write a book, about life, food and spiritual journeys. And next November or December he wants to visit Slovenia, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Lithuania. Any place where the people are alive and celebrate through their food.

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The gelato in Milan gives Eric Nittolo his happy face.

Look for more stories about influencers of the Leelanau County food scene, and what inspires them, in future editions of the Sun.

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GLEN ARBOR CHANGES

continues from page 1

helped to rebuild Chicago after the Great Fire of 1871 ravaged the city when Mrs. O’Leary’s cow (supposedly) kicked over a lantern ... it’s that kind of history that makes you appreciate a place.

When Jeff and Georgia Gietzen purchased the property next to their Northwoods Hardware location—formerly Wildflower’s Home Décor store—from a downstate company who was going to put in 12 condominiums, it was with the idea that the space would enhance business with the addition of a rental center and expanded nursery, but that it was also sorely needed to relieve the challenging and sometimes dangerous parking situation that occurs each summer when business in Glen Arbor skyrockets.

Change happens. Expansions happen. Trees are cut down including a few precious hardwoods that were more than 75 years old. “There is always a concern,” said Gillian Gietzen, “when there are so many people who have been coming to a place for so many years of their lives. Change and expansion aren’t always a welcome thing in a small town, but we have always maintained we are a family business first—dedicated to our community and to customer service.”

There is a saying among Glen Arbor residents that even in the middle of winter you could walk into Northwoods Hardware needing the most obscure item and they will have it. It’s become a part of the local lore for anyone to try and disprove this. Before Jeff and Georgia purchased the original Northwoods Home Center at its current location on South Glen Lake Road, it was called the Old School Hardware located in the Brick School house on Western Avenue, and primarily served the construction community and general contractors.

South of town on M-22, the quaint blue and white “Welcome to Glen Arbor” sign greets you on the right, and as you cross the Crystal River driving northeast is The Mill—the rebirthed, refurbished property bought by Turner Booth. The Brammer Grist Mill—once an actual working mill—has been inoperable since the 1970s when Fred Ball, of the Ball Canning Jar family, last used it as a recording studio. The peeled paint, sagging roof lines, and crumbling structures almost slipped into the Crystal River, but have now been replaced, repainted, and revived. Inside there is a café that will open soon, plans for a small restaurant and cocktail bar, and the possible milling of their own flour for use in baked goods and for public resale. It’s the ‘recycle-renew-reuse’ concept put into action.

In the book *How Buildings Learn: What Happens After They’re Built*, Stewart Brand writes, “Buildings can tell stories, if they’re allowed—if their pasts are flaunted rather than concealed.”

I moved to this area of Michigan



Ethan and Hannah Goss and Sam Holmes took one last cross-country ski of the winter on March 26 at Pierce Stocking Scenic Drive overlook 9.

from Ketchum, Idaho, in March 2017. The line I used with my western friends was, “I fell in love and married a house.” At that time I had scoured every place I loved to find a home I could afford, *that I liked*, and a place to make a life. Moving from Ketchum to northern Michigan might have shocked my Idaho chums, but when they visited they understood the draw—pines and white Birch trees that illuminate in the sunlight, water in shades of cobalt and jade you’ve never even seen before, Easter Egg daffodils and crocus growing wild on the roadside, sunsets on Lake Michigan that could go on for what felt like days. If you can’t fall in love with northern Michigan in spring and summer then face it, you can’t fall in love ... and everyone loves northern Michigan.

In 2011, the National Park Service reported the increase of tourism to the Glen Arbor area was up over 20 percent. Between 2018 and 2020, Glen Arbor saw an influx of visitors and second home owners who fled their crowded cities to an area known for its quiet clear blue lakes, striking views, hiking and biking trails, and few full-time residents. The demand for services and workers also increased, straining supply chains and local businesses. Real estate and housing prices rose, and the ability for service workers to live a reasonable drive time from their place of work became almost impossible. A town can change while our attention is focused on something else ... like a pandemic.

If you had been coming to Glen Arbor each summer since you were young, you might remember that you could at one time park your car anywhere on the street because there were no curbs or dedicated parking. You might remember that Bob Sutherland’s Cherry Republic started as a t-shirt shop in a van, or you might have chased Petoskey Pete’s around summer after summer because their location changed to a different building almost every year.

“Most of the time buildings will adapt,” writes Brand, “because the usage in and around them are changing constantly.” Certainly, this is true of Glen Arbor.

Small towns that adapt to change do so because new owners and new businesses are always redefining old buildings to new and current use.

“Buildings adapt best,” said Brand, “when constantly refined and reshaped by their occupants, and architects can mature from being artists of space to becoming artists of time.”

The Glen Arbor Bed and Breakfast has been a marker of time for many—certainly for its most recent stewards, Patricia and Larry Widmayer, who purchased the property 23 years ago from Mike Sutherland. Mike bought the property from the Andresens 10 years before that. Mrs. Andresen used to serve Sunday chicken dinners from the dining room to visitors before the Second World War. In 1920, John and Linda Pepler’s mother, Helen Radar Pepler, was born in that home. Over the course of their 23-year tenure, the Widmayers used three notebooks to run the bed and breakfast: one for reservations, one for marketing, and one for operations—no fancy computer system needed—and it apparently worked just fine. A 150-year-old building has a lot to say about a community. This building deserves to be flaunted, simply because it has marked time for so many people for so long.

The new owner of Glen Arbor Bed and Breakfast, Michael Aragon—who married into the Warnes family, which has a long history in Glen Arbor—has said that the Inn will open for business as usual this summer.

“The evolution of a business or a building in a town is that it’s constantly morphing,” said Aragon. “The baseline is not to have to build something new, but to strive for quality with what already exists. Towns can still hold on to their image because making improvements are about making what you already have work better for everyone.”

How do we end up choosing the places we live in this world? It might be fate or a calling, and it might be random, but random doesn’t feel quite right. The answer is different for each of us: maybe you have been coming here since you were a child; or you’re the legacy owner of a lake cottage; or maybe you arrived during the pandemic, fell in love with northern Michigan and never left; or maybe you’re just like me and got lucky. It is important to preserve and honor the physical fabric and social histories of the places we choose to live. Stay in one place long enough and you’ll see change—buildings morph and adjust into new ventures, businesses expand. The next time you drive through Glen Arbor look around and remember where you live ... it’s evolving every day right before our eyes.

Iconic local businesses are changing hands. Check out our upcoming editions of the Sun for coverage.

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Movie: *The Biggest little Farm*
Friday, April 21, 5:00 PM - 7:00 PM, Free

Join us in the big room of the OAB for a free screening of *The Biggest little Farm*, a beautiful film that chronicles the eight-year quest of John and Molly Chester as they trade city living for 200 acres of barren farmland and a dream to harvest in harmony with nature.

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Saturday, April 22, 1:00 PM - 4:00 PM, \$85

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