



From one Michigan roaster to another, Leelanau Coffee stays grounded

By Cameryn Cass
Sun contributor

Thirty-three years after two brothers started the locally loved—and widely recognized—Leelanau Coffee Roasting Co., they sold it.

The acquisition officially took place on New Year's Day when Grand Rapids-based Schuil Coffee Co. took it over.

Like Leelanau Coffee, Schuil is a specialty, Michigan-based roaster that's withstood the test of time. In fact, when Garry and Gladys Schuil started the company in 1981, it became the first specialty coffee roaster in the state.

Schuil boasts bean flavors like Blueberry Crumble and Michigan Sweet Cherry, not unlike Leelanau Coffee's Manitou Blueberry and Leelanau Cherry.

"There's a ton of overlap," said Tim Volkema, the owner and CEO of Schuil Coffee, of the two companies. "And I've been really impressed with everyone I've met so far. You never know

how these things will go, but I'm more encouraged the more people I meet."

Inside the Glen Arbor cafe, things feel unchanged.

"Right now, it's business as usual and will be for the foreseeable future," said Mara Miller, the cafe's manager and one of its longest working employees.

"It's like Art's," Miller explained, which sold last June. "You go in, and not much has changed for customers."

Volkema echoed that sentiment.

"From a product standpoint, we'll continue what Leelanau has built," said Volkema.

Both companies buy similar specialty beans, he said, so "there's no scenario where it makes sense to change Leelanau to Schuil."

"They'll sit next to one another on the shelf," he continued. "Most people won't even notice the change."

Plus, Steve and John Arens, the

See LEELANAU COFFEE on page 11



Photos by James Weston Schaberg of ice caves this month along the Leelanau County shoreline.

Nightmare on Ice, Miracle on Ice

Remembering a near-death experience on frozen Lake Michigan

From staff reports

It was Super Bowl Sunday of 1984, and the carefree 15-year-old girls wanted to find ice caves.

Karen Gros and Bobbi Boos, students at the Leelanau School north of Glen Arbor, walked onto frozen Sleeping Bear Bay in search of tunnels and mammoth formations they expected to find on Lake Michigan. They dressed in warm winter gear and carried ski poles to test the depth of the ice.

"What stood out at first was how

crappy the ice was," remembered Gros, who currently lives in Northport. "The ice caves were epic for years before that. There were walls of ice and little volcanoes, and the lake had frozen almost to the Manitou Islands in previous years. They were fascinating to explore."

But on this day the girls suddenly found themselves on a chunk of ice that broke off from the pack and began floating away from the shore.

"I thought we were on something

See ICE DANGER on page 10



Tim Volkema (l) acquired the Leelanau Coffee Roasting Co. from Steve and John Arens (r).

Family of ICE detainee offers mutual aid for fellow immigrants

By Jacob Wheeler
Sun editor

One week after Fernando Ramirez was released from the massive federal immigrant detention center in Baldwin, he sat beside his eldest grandchild Liam on Jan. 17 in a family member's home in Grand Rapids and placed a lit candle in the 13-year-old boy's birthday cake.

"You are affectionate and charismatic. I wish you everlasting happiness," the *abuelo* told the newly minted teenager in Spanish as a smile spread across the boy's face and he valiantly held back tears. Each mem-

ber of the Ramirez family bestowed Liam with a candle and words, but he shares a special bond with Fernando.

For more than three months Liam, his younger sister Ximena, and their mother Samantha had visited Fernando once a week for sessions of 90 minutes at the North Lake Processing Center an hour from their home. During each visit, the kids would playfully stroke his growing beard. Before Fernando was taken by ICE agents on Sept. 29, 2025, the 59-year-old native of Mexico sported a goatee.

Fernando, who had no criminal record other than a speeding ticket, was

driving a semi-truck when he was stopped at a weigh station in northwest Indiana by state troopers. Fernando, who crossed the border undocumented to San Diego at age 19 and moved to Grand Rapids at age 31, worked for decades for a company that cleaned local big box stores in West Michigan before he realized his childhood dream of driving a big rig. For the past three years he drove semis, first transporting fruit

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Fernando Ramirez embraces his family after his release from ICE detention in Baldwin on Jan. 10.

Not a sprint, not a marathon. For Minnesotans it's a relay race

Report from the resistance to ICE's invasion of Minneapolis

By Julia Wheeler Ludden
Sun contributor

We take the bags of groceries—dried beans, rice, cornmeal, plantains, avocados, fruit pulps, meats I don't recognize and juices with names I can't pronounce—and load them into the IKEA bags in my trunk. Quickly, in case Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents are nearby. Five deliveries today, down to Eagan, out to Woodbury, and a few in St Paul. The car smells like tamales. This isn't our usual Sunday afternoon Trader Joe's run.

"This is my gun," the grocer says with a weary smile, pointing to the black plastic whistle hanging around his neck. I wrap an arm around him. We've been coming here for weeks now, picking up groceries to deliver to families "sheltering in place." Usually reserved for natural disasters, this phrase now applies to many people of color in Minnesota. It's anything but natural, and yet, two months into the largest federal immigration roundup operation in U.S. history, it has started to feel normal. White folks and brave Black and Brown U.S. citizens deliver a lot of food these days. We all



Photo by Catherine Reid Day
Candles at the Alex Pretti memorial site.

follow the same protocols: Text when you arrive. Don't knock. Expect dark windows, shades drawn. They're home.

After the first delivery, the woman texts me, *Dios los bendigo*. I Google translate it. "God bless you." I have so many questions, but I don't ask. It's not just unauthorized immigrants who are staying home. Along with people who crossed the border illegally (in some cases decades ago), ICE has taken legal refugees, U.S. citizens, even Native Americans (where do they plan to deport *them*?). Anyone Brown. Anyone who looks African. Anyone

See MINNESOTA RESISTS on page 8

Empire hosts Winterfest on Saturday, Feb. 21

From staff reports

As northern Michigan continues to experience a very snowy and cold winter, the Empire Area Community Center (EACC) plans to embrace the elements with the annual Empire Winterfest. Events will be hosted throughout the village of Empire on Saturday, Feb. 21, including the long-standing tradition of a polar plunge in South Bar Lake.

Festivities will begin at 9 am with yoga at the Township Hall. From 11 am-3 pm the Friends of the Library will host a book sale at the Glen Lake Community Library. At 1 pm, brave souls (and encouraging spectators!) are invited to South Bar Lake near the north end of the parking lot for the famous polar plunge in the frozen lake. Northern Heat Sauna and Sleeping Bear Sauna will have saunas available at the beach for public use from 12:30-3 pm.

From 2-5 pm, Grocer's Daughter and Tiffany's Cafe will host activities at their shops. Tiffany's Cafe will

be open for coffee and indoor winter fun, and Grocer's Daughter will have s'mores, fires, and winter fun in their garden, and drink specials indoors.

Both the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore and Leelanau Conservancy are joining the activities this year. A viewing of "Island Life: The Story of North Manitou Island" will be screened indoors at the National Park Visitor's Center at 11 am. At 2:30 pm, join docents from the Leelanau Conservancy for a snowshoe hike through their Chippewa Run property. Parking will be available on Fisher Street, near the recycling drop-off.

In the evening, there will be a soup potluck at the Empire Township Hall from 5-7 pm. Music will be provided by Charlie Arnett. Arnett is a singer/songwriter based in Traverse City, and his repertoire is a mix of originals and feel-good covers. Potluck attendees are invited to bring a salad, soup, or dessert to share.

We look forward to joining together as



Photo by Jack Gyr

a community on Saturday, February 21, to enjoy a day of winter fun in Empire!

All Winterfest activities are free to attend, and the event is sponsored by the Empire Area Community Center (EACC). Events are weather-permitting; view the online schedule for weather-related updates. A freewill offering will

be taken during the potluck to support EACC's general fund, which is invested back into the community through events like this one. For more details, including a full schedule of events, visit empirearearecommunitycenter.org, or empirechamber.com/event/empire-winterfest

Grand Traverse Band warns members of encounters with ICE

From staff reports

With daily reports flashing from major Midwestern cities of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) attacks on immigrants and communities of color, the Grand Traverse Band (GTB) of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians took the unprecedented step on Jan. 15 of issuing an advisory to its tribal members to coach them on how to handle encounters with ICE agents.

GTB chair Sandra Witherspoon told the *Glen Arbor Sun* that, while she has heard rumors of increased ICE activity in northern Michigan, she has no concrete evidence of a stepped-up presence in the coming days. Nevertheless, out of an "abundance of caution," she said that tribal government decided to issue the advisory.

Witherspoon cited ICE's detention of Native Americans from the Oglala Sioux Tribe during its attack on Minneapolis in recent days. Last month, dozens of Native Americans from western states reported that they were questioned or detained by ICE. The surge prompted the Native American Rights Fund yesterday to issue "resources for individuals and nonprofits approached by ICE".

The Jan. 15 advisory from the Grand Traverse Band encourages tribal members to carry their GTB Tribal ID card and to calmly identify their citizenship status if confronted by a federal agent.

"If stopped by ICE, (typically a person heavily armed with guns, in camo military fatigues and a baklava face mask obscuring the offices' facial identity) remain calm and do not physically resist. State clearly: 'I am a citizen of the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, a federally recognized sovereign nation, and I am a United States citizen.'"

The GTB advisory mentioned racial profiling practices now permitted under the Trump regime.

"Recent legal developments and Supreme Court rulings (e.g., *Noem v. Vasquez Perdomo*) have authorized federal agents, including ICE, to conduct brief investigative detentions commonly referred to as 'Kavanaugh stops' based on perceived ethnicity, language, or occupation. Considering these racial profiling practices that have the consequent of including Native Americans as a class subject to 'Kavanaugh stops,' all GTB Tribal Members are advised to understand their rights and the legal weight of their Tribal Identification in protecting you from ICE enforcement practices."

Key legal protections highlighted in the advisory include: the right to remain silent; to request a supervisory officer, and request a judicial warrant if an ICE officer attempts to enter a home or private workplace. The advisory encourages GTB members to carry their tribal ID, record any interactions with ICE



agents, and if detained, attempt to notify GTB tribal council, tribal police or the tribe's legal department immediately.

The advisory offered the following contact information:

- GTB Legal Department General

Counsel John F. Petoskey, Cell 231-631-8624, Desk 231-534-7279

• GTB Police Captain Dave Crocket, Cell 231-866-1264, Desk 231-534-7182

• GTB Membership Office, Desk 231-534-7670

Dune Bird wins wine awards

From staff reports

Dune Bird Winery, the newest member of the Harmony Estate Wineries of Leelanau, announced a standout first showing at the 2026 San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition, earning a Double Gold and multiple additional medals in one of North America's most competitive wine judging events. Among nearly 5,500 entries from 950+ wineries, Dune Bird captured top recognition for its Leelanau Peninsula whites—an early milestone for the young label and a major win for Northern Michigan on a national stage.

"This is a first win for Dune Bird, and it's especially meaningful to debut with a Double Gold," said winemaker Blake Lougheed. "It reflects the focus we put on site expression and precision winemaking in every lot."

Dune Bird Winery received the fol-

lowing awards: Double Gold — NV Dune Bird Dry Riesling (Leelanau Peninsula); Gold — NV Dune Bird Late Harvest Riesling (Leelanau Peninsula); Silver — NV Dune Bird Chardonnay (Leelanau Peninsula)

Founded decades ago and widely regarded for elevating North American wine, the San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition has become a cornerstone event in the industry's calendar—offering winners broad exposure through Chronicle coverage and its highly attended public tasting. Gold and above award recipients will be recognized in the San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition Awards special section on Sunday, March 8, and the Public Tasting returns Saturday, March 7.

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Take the edge off winter with Northport Performing Arts Center

By Ross Boissoneau
Sun contributor

It's a community party. It's a mystery. And it's a delicious farce.

Welcome to the next Cocktails, Canapés, and Comedy theater production, courtesy of the Northport Performing Arts Center. The two-act play *Unnecessary Farce* involves two cops, three crooks, eight doors and plenty of laughter.

The plot revolves around a corrupt mayor who is meeting with his female accountant in a motel, while in the room next door, two undercover cops wait to catch the meeting on video. There's some confusion as to who's in which room, who's being videotaped, who has the money, who hired a hitman and why. Plus, why does the accountant keep taking off her clothes?

The performance is the successor to dinner theater programs the group used to perform at Tucker's of Northport, now Northport Pub & Grille. Now of-

fered at the Willowbrook Mill events venue, the shows include appetizers prior to curtain and desserts during intermission, as well as a cash bar.

"People come early, mingle, have a drink," says Laura Kalchik, who has what she calls a small role in the play and is acting as a stage manager. When she spoke about the show, she was also busy making props for the play: delicious-looking donuts for the police officers' room, made from spray-foam insulation, paint and sprinkles. Yum.

While Kalchik is busy making those enticing-looking donuts, the folks at Northport's Around the Corner Food and Fun are busy making the real thing. Audience members will be treated to what Kalchik calls heavy hors d'oeuvres prior to curtain. Then at intermission they're again free to get up, stretch their legs, grab a drink and chat with their friends while enjoying dessert.

The Willowbrook is set up so the audience is peering into the two side-by-side motel rooms. Kalchik gives props to



the set design, including the doors that are a key part of the confusion, as the cast try to grapple with who is coming, who is going, and to and from where. "The doors are amazing," she says, noting the donation of five of them from Northport Building Supply saved the group time and money. The set also includes the motel room walls, passages, a bathroom. The audience enters the Willowbrook alongside the back wall of the set.

She says the show is a perfect antidote to the feeling of being cooped up indoors when it's so cold and grey you don't want to leave the house. "It's winter, it's Northport," she says. "We create something fun locally." It is a way to stir some excitement in the town at the tip of the Leelanau Peninsula, get residents enthusiastic to go out, see their neighbors and yes, have some fun.

While it is geared toward the local community, Kalchik says the show draws people from elsewhere in the

county, Traverse City, even beyond. "There are a lot of Northport residents, but cast members have friends and family from Walloon Lake, Traverse City," she says.

The cast of seven includes Kalchik, Justin Berryman, Joel Hoard, Greg Maier, Gloria Thomas, John Todd and Kim Todd. It is directed by Joe Thatcher.

What's next for Kalchik after the donuts? She's moving on to creating bagpipes. Don't ask, just come to the show.

The performance dates are Feb. 13-15 and Feb. 20-22. Friday showtime is 7 p.m., with doors opening at 6 p.m. for appetizers and cash bar. Showtime for the Saturday and Sunday performances is 4 p.m., with doors opening at 3 p.m. for appetizers and cash bar.

Tickets are \$60, which include both hors d'oeuvres and dessert along with the show. They can be purchased online at NorthportPerformingArts.org or by calling 231-386-2009. Seating is limited.

Small is beautiful: Living large in a tiny house

From staff reports

In 2012 Leelanau County couple Rolf and Mari von Walthausen decided to move from their 2,000-square-foot home into a 240-square-foot tiny house. The couple will talk about their radical resizing—how and why they did it—at the Glen Arbor Arts Center February 22 at 1 p.m. The program, *Living Large In A Tiny House*, is free, and is offered as part of the GAAC's INTERiors exhibition.

The von Walthausens' transition

from a conventional dwelling to one of more modest dimensions was a process of exploration, and experimentation. They were challenged by the necessity to divest themselves of stuff, both dear and dispensable; and to discover how two grown adults could find deep satisfaction living in a small space. But the largeness of what they gained in relation to what they willingly gave up is at the heart of this story. The program will include slide images of the von Walthausens' home and place.

The GAAC's INTERiors exhibition is Jan. 9 - March 12. In the event of inclement weather, the snow date for *Living Large In A Tiny House* is March 7. For more information visit GlenArborArt.org/EVENTS.




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National Lakeshore, Preserve host Maple Sugaring Days

From staff reports

March is maple sugaring time in northern Michigan. An annual Maple Sugaring Days event presented by Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore in partnership with Preserve Historic Sleeping Bear will be held over two days—March 7-8 at the Olsen and Dechow Farms. Saturday hours are 10 am-3 pm and Sunday hours are 11 am-3 pm. Maple Sugaring Days offers a variety of demonstrations and hands-on activities to get outdoors and learn about the history of maple sugaring.

The family event allows attendees to experience the process and evolution of making maple syrup from start to finish, including a stop at the historic Dechow sugar shack. After viewing the process in action at the Dechow farm, visit the Olsen Farm across the street, to see the final boiling of sap, sugar making, kids' games, and maple syrup snow cones. Various maple products and maple syrup will be on-hand in the Olsen farmhouse. If walking between stops at the Dechow

farm is not your pace, a one-stop demonstration is on-going at the Olsen Farm.

Participants should plan on spending 2 ½ hours at this event to experience both farm sites. Parking is available at each farm in a snow-plowed field near the farmhouses. Participants can drive and park at each site or follow the groomed path to cross M-22. These events are free for the public with a park entrance pass. If there is snow or ice, attendees are encouraged to bring trekking poles, or snowshoes for the hike at Dechow farm. Snowshoes will be available to borrow on a first-come, first-served basis. Dechow Farm: 3991 W Harbor Hwy.; Olsen Farm: 3164 W Harbor Hwy, located just 4 miles north of Glen Arbor.

As part of the festivities, a Community Pancake Breakfast at The Homestead Resort's CQ's Cabin, will be held on Saturday, March 7 from 8 am-noon only. Menu includes pancakes and syrup, sausage, bacon, eggs, potatoes, fruit and beverages at \$17 per adult, \$9 per child ages 6-12, and free for children 5 and under. The breakfast is hosted by the



Homestead Resort sponsored by Sleeping Bear Visitor's Bureau with proceeds benefiting Preserve Historic Sleeping

Bear. No reservations are required for the breakfast or any of the weekend's events. Visit Phsb.org/maple-sugar-days-2.

Folded Leaf finds new home at Commongrounds in Traverse City

From staff reports

The Folded Leaf, an independent new & used bookstore and community gathering space rooted in Cedar, has announced a new home within Commongrounds Cooperative at 414 E. Eighth Street in Traverse City, marking a transition shaped by reflection, care, and a continued commitment to community.

The announcement comes with mixed emotions for many who have found connection and comfort within The Folded Leaf's Cedar location. Since opening in April 2025, the space has served as more than a bookstore—it has been a place to gather, rest, and feel less alone. That history remains central to the organization's identity.

The move follows challenges related to the renewal of The Folded Leaf's Cedar lease. As renewal discussions progressed, several new requirements were introduced, making it increasingly difficult to continue operating the space as originally intended. One of those requirements significantly reduced occupancy, effectively preventing gatherings, workshops, and community events—activities that have been core to The Folded Leaf's mission.

Rather than ask the community to accept a reduced version of what the space was created to offer, the shop owner and Cedar native, Rachel Zemanek, chose to seek a location that would allow that work to continue with integrity.

The Folded Leaf will remain open in Cedar for the time being, and any future changes to that location will be communicated clearly and directly,

with care for the community that has supported the space from the beginning.

The new location within Commongrounds Cooperative offers an opportunity to continue this work in a setting designed to support gathering and collaboration. Commongrounds is Michigan's first cooperative real estate development — a mixed-use community center that brings together workforce housing, nonprofit and business tenants, common areas, and dedicated spaces for visual arts and events. Serving the intersection of food, family, arts, and wellness, Commongrounds creates an environment where organizations like The Folded Leaf can thrive alongside others committed to community care and connection. This setting naturally supports The Folded Leaf's mission of gathering and community programming, offering the infrastructure and shared values needed to host workshops, readings, and events that bring people together. The Traverse City space allows The Folded Leaf to expand programming and maintain an independent bookstore presence near downtown Traverse City, while staying grounded in the values that shaped it.

This next chapter is not intended to replace Leelanau County, but to build upon what was learned there. The Folded Leaf remains committed to maintaining connections in Leelanau through future pop-ups, partnerships, and programming, guided by the belief that community spaces rooted in compassion and belonging are essential.

At its core, The Folded Leaf continues to be defined not by walls, but

by people — and by the shared understanding that stories and community endure, even as they grow and change.

A soft opening at the Traverse City

location is planned for early March, with a Grand Re-Opening and Re-Location celebration scheduled for April 26.



Leelanau Wine holds Snow on the vines

From staff reports

The Leelanau Peninsula Wine Trail is excited to announce the launch of its newest winter event, Snow on The Vines, taking place February 20–22. This inaugural winter celebration invites wine lovers to experience the charm of Northern Michigan's wine country wrapped in a cozy, snow-kissed setting.

Snow on The Vines is a curated food and wine pairing event, showcasing the creativity of participating wineries as they pair select wines with thoughtfully crafted bites designed to complement each pour. Guests will enjoy warming flavors, intimate winery

atmospheres, and the quiet beauty of the Leelanau Peninsula in winter.

"Winter offers a unique and magical way to experience our wineries," said Andie Hobbins, Managing Director of the Leelanau Peninsula Wine Trail.

"Snow on The Vines was created to highlight the comfort, hospitality, and exceptional wine and food pairings our wineries offer during the quieter season."

Tickets are affordably priced to encourage exploration and connection:

A full weekend pass (Friday–Sunday) costs \$30. A Sunday only pass costs \$20.

Tickets and additional event details will be available through LPwines.com. Advance tickets recommended.



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New Michigan program aims to help farms continue by connecting buyers with sellers

By Miles MacClure
For the Northern Michigan Journalism Collaborative

For the past three years, David Weeks has searched for a young farmer to take over his organic vegetable farm, La Casa Verde, in Cedar.

But, so far, he hasn't found a buyer who intends to keep the property as a working farm.

"I strongly want to see this property remain in agriculture and remain a part of the resilient Michigan community and economy," he said. "The last thing I want is for this property to get bought by some gazillionaire and they knock down the old buildings and build an estate house, and they're there two weeks out of the year."

In October, Weeks began advertising his farm on MIFarmLink, a new program that helps match aspiring farmers with those looking to retire and hand their operations over to the next generation. One goal of MIFarmLink is to ensure farmland remains farmland amid a push by big developers to convert rural properties to data centers, solar or wind farms, housing, and other projects.

The program launched as thousands of farms disappear across the US and Michigan as farmers retire and sell off their land and fewer young people get into the business. In addition, regulations, rising costs, lack of available labor and weather disasters have driven farmers out of the industry, Zippy Duvall, president of the American Farm Bureau Federation, said in a 2024 post urging Congress to do more to protect the industry.

"Family farms not only help drive the economy, they allow the rest of the nation the freedom to pursue their dreams without worrying about whether there will be enough food in their pantries," Duvall said in the post.

In 2022, the US Department of Agriculture reported the average farmer was about 57 years old. The 2022 Census of Agriculture reported about 1.9 million farms in operation then — the first time since the Civil War that fewer than 2 million farms were reported and a decline of about 7% since the 2017 census.

In Michigan, 44,000 farms were in operation in 2024, down from 47,200 in 2019, per USDA data. The amount of Michigan farmland shrank from 9.8 million acres in 2019 to 9.4 million acres in 2024.

The food and agriculture industry supports more than 800,000 jobs and generates nearly \$126 billion in economic impact in Michigan, according to the state Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.



Weeks doesn't want to see his farm as another declining statistic, but he said "it's getting harder and harder for me to do the physical work," and he guessed he'll be able to continue farming for another five years at most.

While he's yet to find a match, Weeks remains hopeful he'll find someone to steward the farm for another generation.

'Kind of like a dating profile'

The MIFarmLink program began in 2021, conceived in Ottawa County and spreading to Washtenaw County in 2023 before going statewide last fall.

In 2024, the program launched a farm-seeking function to help aspiring farmers connect with established farms.

"It's kind of a dating profile for a farmer," said Jill Dohner, the MIFarmLink program director.

Financial barriers persist for young people who want to start a farm.

"The entry cost to get into farming is so high," said Jamie Rahrig, director of Food and Farm Business Assistance at the Center for Regional Food Systems at Michigan State University.

To qualify for loans offered by the USDA and the Farm Service Agency, farmers must own the land they're farming on, "so they have to have that first big barrier of being able to purchase land, and they can't just be leasing the land," Rahrig added.

Including MIFarmLink, 38 programs across the country connect beginning farmers with established farms.

MIFarmLink advertises itself as a mutually beneficial program for existing farms and aspiring farmers. For

aging farmers, the opportunity to sell their farm will allow them to retire, while the younger generation can take over an operation that's already up and running, oftentimes with farm equipment included in the deal.

'They really want to find the right fit'

A diverse array of farms are posted on the MIFarmLink website, including small organic farms and larger corn and soybean operations. Currently, 60 farms looking for a successor have opened profiles on the website, while more than 600 individuals seeking a farm have signed up for the program, said Dohner, the MIFarmLink program director.

Dohner said farms that have made successful connections usually meet with three to four potential suitors before finding the right person to take over their farm.

"It takes a lot of time to find the right fit, especially for the aging farmer who has been on the land for 40-, 50-plus years," said Dohner. "And they really want to find the right fit. They want to find the right farmer who's good for their operation and their farm."

So far, the program has made 12 links throughout Michigan, but Dohner wouldn't say how successful those links have been. She said the organization plans to track the success of the farm

See MIFarmLink on page 6

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MIFarmLink

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transitions over the next several years.

Aspiring farm owners who have signed up for MIFarmLink come from a diverse range of backgrounds, said Alexa Tedeschi, communications coordinator at MIFarmLink. The list spans recent college graduates with some agriculture experience to military veterans looking to make farming their career post-service.

“I think this platform has made a lot of people that haven’t done farming before and are interested and maybe have a dream,” she said.

“I do see the youthful energy of young farmers coming up, and that inspires me,” Dohner said.

‘That prime agricultural land’

Some farmers looking to retire have entertained offers for their land from real estate developers and data center developers. Data centers, which have drawn protests in many of the communities where they’ve been proposed, often offer large sums for farmland. In Michigan, the value of farm property

is growing faster than farm values nationwide, thanks in part to purchases by commercial development groups.

“That, I think, is definitely something that is in conflict with wanting to try to save that prime agricultural land for farmers,” said Dohner.

“One of the issues is that developers can purchase the land for so much more money than what another farmer might be able to purchase that land for,” said Rahrig.

Weeks’ farm, La Casa Verde, is a small vegetable farm with 17 acres of tillable land.

At age 68, Weeks hopes to retire in the next few years, but he’s hoping to hold out for the right buyer.

Weeks said he’s had serious conversations with five prospective buyers for his farm in the past three years, but none were quite the right fit. Some were interested in flipping the property or subdividing the land for real estate developments, so he chose not to sell to them. He said only two prospective buyers intended to continue farming on the property, but talks fell apart for financial reasons.

“People don’t see farming as a wor-



thy career,” said Weeks.

Weeks has entertained the idea of training a farmer who doesn’t have any farming experience, with the idea that they’ll eventually purchase the farm or take over farm operations.

But, he said, it’s difficult to balance the current needs of the farm while

simultaneously planning for the future.

“I can get four to eight times the productivity out of (a migrant) worker as I would out of one of these people who I have to train,” he said. “So, as a business person, one has to look at that productivity aspect of it. I can’t afford to be training someone on basic agronomy.”

Communities, researchers measure ice thickness on Great Lakes

By Vivian La
Interlochen Public Radio

Scientists are asking for help from the public this winter to measure how thick the ice is on the Great Lakes and inland lakes.

Data submitted by ice fishers and other people who spend time on frozen lakes could improve the models that forecast ice cover on the Great Lakes. Satellites do a good job at capturing how much ice there is, but not how thick it is, according to researchers at the Great Lakes Observing System (GLOS) in Ann Arbor.

More data could give researchers insight as to how climate change is altering ice cover in the region and provide important safety information for people out on the ice.

Researchers are seeking data on ice thickness and snow cover, which can be submitted online. Stipends are also available to volunteers who contribute data from the Great Lakes.

“Usually it’s the scientists putting data out to the public, and this

time, we’re asking the public to give feedback to the scientists so they can improve the models,” said Shelby Brunner, science and observations manager at GLOS.

She said buoys that collect data on lakes typically get pulled out in the winter because of harsh conditions.

The citizen science program is in its second year of data collection. Last year, the program recruited around a dozen people in the Great Lakes region and logged around 30 measurements.

Brunner said the data showed researchers that ice is more variable than they initially predicted. That’s why more data from people who are already “in tune with the ice” is useful to tap into, she said.

“They’re posting pictures of when there’s water in between layers of ice, and that’s information that is so novel for the modelers to have,” Brunner said. “If we can continually improve, we’re going to get safer and safer predictions.”

The data is also useful as ice formation on the Great Lakes shifts with



climate change, Brunner said.

Research suggests that average ice cover on the Great Lakes has decreased overall since the 1990s, but year-to-year variability is high. That means there are years with very little ice or years with a lot of it — as of Jan. 26, 43% of the Great Lakes had iced over this winter.

“We don’t get to go back in time and measure the past. We have to measure it now and keep it safe. So we can use it for reference for how things are looking in the future,” Brunner said.

It’s not just ice fishers who can contribute data. Mandi Young, science teacher at the Pathfinder School in Traverse City, took her middle school students out last year to measure ice thickness on Cedar Lake.

Young has her students regularly collect information from the water like temperature or depth to compare to previous years. Ice thickness was another data point they could add to the mix, she said.

“The students really love it. They get the chance to be outside. They know that their information is being saved and used by other community members,” Young said.

Young plans to have her students measure ice thickness again this winter. This time, they have an auger to drill holes into the icy lake.

She said one of her favorite parts is the questions students ask while they’re out taking measurements: “‘Could we throw a rock on it, will it break? Oh what about throwing ice on ice, what’s gonna happen? Oh did you hear that sound?’”

“Kids just get curious about ice,” she said.

The data they collect from inland lakes like this one will be kept for archives and used in future research.



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MUTUAL AID

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to California and lately staying closer to home at the request of his family.

Aware of the dangers posed by ICE's ramped-up presence in Chicago during "Operation Midway Blitz" last fall, he had agreed with his daughters Samantha and Nahomi that the late September trip would be his last.

Instead, he spent a couple days in Chicago's Broadview detention center, before he was moved to the Baldwin facility, which is owned by the private, for-profit prison corporation Geo Group on a contract with Immigration and Custom Enforcement (ICE). North Lake currently holds more than 1,400 detainees, making it the largest in the Midwest. Were it to reach capacity of 1,800 prisoners, North Lake would rank among the largest nationwide—a key weapon in the Trump administration's campaign to deport a record number of immigrants. Many of those held in Baldwin through the fall and winter were arrested during ICE's siege of Chicago.

And yet, like Fernando, 89 percent of detainees at North Lake do not have criminal records, according to ICE's own data.

The Baldwin prison sits in rural Lake County, one of the poorest in Michigan—equidistant between Grand Rapids and Traverse City and a mere 75 minutes from the wealth and tranquility of Leelanau County. North Lake immediately became the biggest employer and contributor to the local tax base when it reopened in June 2025.

Since then the facility has drawn scrutiny for the death of a Bulgarian on Dec. 15 who operated a small business in Chicago prior to his arrest, alleged overcrowding of inmates and not enough staff, fears of tuberculosis outbreaks, chickenpox and COVID-19, and reports from prisoners of cold temperatures, intermittent electricity, and lack of warm meals for dinner. Detainees, who are disproportionately young, working-age men, struggle to eat enough calories if they miss the early-morning call for breakfast.

The detainee population has included a global mix: Mexicans, Central Americans and South Americans; Middle Easterners, Eastern Europeans, Africans, Chinese, even the children of Hmong refugees whose parents served with the U.S. military during the "secret war" in the 1970s. Some were seized at work, some in their homes, some while traveling to school to pick up their children.

Reaction to the presence of the prison among Lake County locals has been mixed. Some welcome the jobs and economic boost to area restaurants and gas stations. Others shudder at their community profiting from an industry built at the expense of immigrants, mostly people of color. Baldwin and the nearby rural resort town of Idlewild have a sizeable Black minority who find unseemly parallels between the federal

government's current demonization of immigrants and historic oppression of African Americans.

"People are saying [this prison is] about economics and creating jobs, but you're running up one group of people," Lake County Commissioner Clyde Welford, who is Black, told me last spring, not long before the prison opened.

"These people have a right to flee a burning house. ... some of them were fleeing atrocities and gangs and people being murdered. They wanted a better way of life. These [Geo Group] guys are going to make money on these people."

From truck driver to comandante

Fernando immediately became a leader and advocate for fellow prisoners in his pod at North Lake—most of whom were Hispanic. Older than most, and fluent in English, he interpreted for them, bonded with them, encouraged them to eat meals, remain active and avoid sleeping too much. Affable and warm, he shared stories with them and used humor to keep their spirits high.

One young detainee from Columbia called Fernando "comandante"—a nickname that stuck. On visits and phone calls with Samantha and Nahomi, he described these young men in his pod as his *familia*.

He stuck up for them, too, when prison employees acted cruel toward them. One day when an impatient guard yelled at the detainees to hurry down a corridor and through a door that was still locked, Fernando confronted the worker. "We're not your livestock," he said in a loud voice. The sentry grew angry and threatened to send Fernando to an isolation cell. Another employee stepped in and calmed the situation.

According to Fernando, most guards at North Lake showed empathy and kindness toward the immigrant detainees and didn't treat them like criminals. The minority share of workers who lacked compassion usually turned their name badges around so inmates and visiting families couldn't identify them.

Fernando's *familia* was broken up when staff moved him into a new section of the prison for detainees with diabetes. He said that conditions in that pod were colder and dirtier, and he received his meals later in the day, which stressed his blood sugar levels. Nevertheless, he took as a "sign from God" that maybe someone else needed to take his place with the *familia*.

The comandante spent the holidays separated from his prison family and his real family. Detainees were given turkey legs to eat for Thanksgiving. On Christmas Day Fernando received a chicken leg for lunch, and because the kitchen staff didn't work in the evening, he was given a cold turkey sandwich and apple for dinner.

Advocating for immigrant families

Samantha and Nahomi quickly realized that they could play a critical role

in supporting not just their father but his fellow detainees at North Lake. They lived a relatively short distance from Baldwin and could visit Fernando each week—unlike some families who didn't have the transportation or the time off work, or they didn't feel safe driving across state lines into the heart of Michigan during a time of heightened fears.

The sisters helped members of Fernando's *familia* inside the prison walls reconnect with their own families. (Some detainees were separated from their cell phones when they were arrested; they hadn't memorized the numbers of their loved ones.) They interpreted for family members who didn't speak English, and sometimes phoned the North Lake staff to share important medical information. They facilitated donations into detainees' commissary accounts so they could buy snacks. When one of Fernando's friends posted bond and was released, the sisters picked him up at the facility and gave him room and board until he could secure transportation back to his home community. During visitations they comforted other families who broke down when the 90-minute sessions ended.

"It's emotional to be with your loved one and then see them walk away again. It's heartbreaking," said Nahomi Ramirez. "I've witnessed mothers pulling their tiny children away from their dad. I've seen young men, in their early 20s, crying and chasing after their dad when it's time to leave."

The sisters began following the Facebook page "Reencuentros de la Luz," which is dedicated to helping Chicago-area families reconnect during and after detentions in immigration facilities. Late last year they decided to start their own page, called "Raíces Migrantes" to help families in West Michigan whose loved ones are detained by ICE—many of them at the North Lake facility in Baldwin.

Since launching in December, Samantha and Nahomi have used "Raíces Migrantes" to network with other mutual aid organizations such as No Detention Centers in Michigan and Indivisible Greater Grand Rapids, offer advice and bridge language barriers for families of detainees, and post heartwarming videos of family reunifications following the release of a prisoner.

"The reunion videos are important for people to see what separations are doing to families," said Nahomi. "Also

to humanize the person who's being taken by ICE. People need to see that this is a person. They have kids at home who are waiting for them. A brother, a sister, a mom who worry about them."

The sisters also serve as dispatchers who network with allies that employ a phone tree through the Signal app to

MUTUAL AID concludes on page 9

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MINNESOTA RESISTS

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who speaks Spanish. I send back a heart emoji, then delete the texts and the woman's address from my phone's map history. Just in case.

Operation Metro Surge began in December 2025, with the Trump administration's promises to detain and deport criminal immigrants in Minnesota. By January, 3,000 ICE and Border Patrol agents were deployed here, and within weeks, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) reported 4,000 arrests across the state. As the Trump administration and DHS assured the country they were coming after "the worst of the worst," contradictory videos and reports from local news and private citizens soon flooded airwaves, social media feeds and text threads. The scenes that emerged showed people without criminal records being detained and deprived of due process, regardless of their legal status. (According to a Feb. 9 CBS News report based on an internal Department of Homeland Security document, less than 14% of nearly 400,000 immigrants arrested by ICE in Trump's first year back in the White House had charges or convictions for violent criminal offenses.) Meanwhile, nonviolent protesters were being threatened and arrested. It didn't make sense. It didn't feel right. A few activist friends shared newly formed mutual aid networks. People started protesting on highway overpasses.

Then, on Jan. 7, an ICE agent killed Renee Good, arguing she had attempted to ram him with her vehicle. Videos disputing his claim went viral, and the protests quickly grew. Local nonprofits, schools, churches, parent teacher associations, and neighborhood groups took to Facebook and Signal chats and to the streets to organize, create and circulate opportunities to give and show support. Communities stepped up, carrying lessons and inspiration from friends in cities that ICE had previously invaded—Chicago, Los Angeles, and Portland. Friends set up observer networks and buddy family programs



Photo by Martin Ludden

The author's front yard vigil for Alex Pretti on Jan. 24.

to pair households in need with people willing to help provide rides to school or medical appointments, grocery deliveries, financial assistance, and more.

Two weeks later, agents shot Alex Pretti 10 times in the back as he lay detained in the street. More videos. Bigger protests nationwide. More businesses started handing out free whistles. "ICE OUT" signs multiplied in yards like ours, and in shop windows across the metro. We watched friends get pepper sprayed, tackled, and doxxed for peacefully voicing opposition, while our government kept saying it was our fault, not theirs.

Tens of thousands marched in subzero temperatures through downtown Minneapolis. Twice. A thousand interfaith leaders came here from all over the country, including a lovely UCC minister from Boston who stayed in our guest room. Non-immigration attorneys volunteered to help local immigration lawyers with the hundreds of first and fourth amendment cases and due process claims piling up from detained refugees and protesters alike. Doctors spoke up about the conditions in detention centers, and the health consequences of so many people of color being prevented from accessing medical care because it's not safe for them to move around the city. Protests erupted all over the country, and internationally. Millions of dollars have flowed into local nonprofits and mutual aid networks.

And here at home, weeks later, we are weary but the work continues. The recent drawdown of 700 agents from Minnesota still leaves more than 2,000

here. Minnesota's Lt Gov Peggy Flanagan shared last weekend at a vigil, "This isn't a sprint, and it's not even a marathon. This a relay, friends." We are not leaderless. We are leaderful. Dozens of protests take place every single day, on street corners in city neighborhoods and suburbs and towns across Minnesota. In one recent weekend, participants at an indigenous-led "Not on Stolen Land" rally tied thousands of prayer ties to the fence separating protesters from ICE headquarters at the Whipple federal building near Minneapolis, while up the road, a Lutheran church hosted a standing-room-only crowd for resistance singing. Elsewhere, a group of protesters were arrested after throwing adult novelty toys and snowballs at ICE agents, and across town, hundreds stood on a frozen lake unveiling a snow sculpture honoring Renee Good and spelling "ICE OUT" with luminaries visible from passing airplanes. Along the Mississippi River, a Kids March walked the Stone Arch Bridge in Minneapolis chanting "We like ice cream, we don't like ICE." Leaderful, indeed.

The dissonance between what we see in our neighborhoods and what we hear from our federal government hits everyone differently. There are grandmas handing out cookies at every protest, but President Trump says we're the radical left. Antifa. My middle schooler calls me from school to say "Mom, I'm going to the walkout at the state capitol. We're getting in Oscar's dad's car right now." It's his first protest. I'm proud but scared. I talk to a friend whose middle schooler just told him, "I don't want to be alive right now." Hugs. Tears. And we're white. No one's hunting us. When they shot Renee Good and Alex Pretti, it became clear that this is about more than immigration enforcement. It's also about our freedom to stand up for what's right, and to document and speak out against what's wrong. "Minnesotans are standing up for the rule of law and the dignity of all people," said Gov. Tim Walz.

After Alex Pretti was killed on Jan. 24, word spread encouraging candlelight vigils at 7 pm across the metro, especially along the multicultural immigrant corridor of Lake Street. We live across the river in St Paul, so we



Photo by Nenick Vu

Interfaith leaders and community groups covered St Paul's Lake Phalen with a traditional Hmong heart reflecting one of the city's largest immigrant communities.

invited neighbors to our front yard and fired up the solo stove; with just an hour's notice, everyone came. It was 10 below zero so people didn't linger, and by 8 pm I was driving to my son's evening futsal game. The roads were quiet, and on every corner along Lake Street, dozens of abandoned candles still flickered in the snowbanks.

"You don't see helicopters just hovering like that here. They were everywhere in Iraq," my husband says. It's harder for him, seeing our cities occupied by thousands of armed federal agents carrying out orders that don't make sense. He's been on the other side. It pisses him off more than it does the rest of us. It did six years ago, too, in the uprising that followed George Floyd's murder. Then, he sat on our front steps with a bourbon and a baseball bat. Today, he fights back by volunteering as a street medic at protests, red duct tape crosses on his arms and his pack. He's loaded with first aid gear and water bottles to flush eyes after tear gas or pepper spray, but mostly it's just doling out handwarmers and fruit snacks.

Last weekend, I joined an anti-ICE protest outside the elementary school of five-year-old Liam Conejo Ramos, the boy with the blue bunny hat who was detained and sent to Texas with his father. Hours after the protest, a judge ordered that Liam and his dad, a lawful asylum seeker, be released and returned to Minnesota. Each day brings new stories of injustice,

MINNESOTA RESISTS concludes on page 9

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MINNESOTA RESISTS

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but also stories of community and strength. Is it helping? A Mexican-American friend, local teacher, and coach says that “it reminds me that most people in Minnesota actually do want me here, whatever ICE or Trump says.” That’s enough to keep me standing on the corner with my “Make Minnesota Boring Again” sign.

Raised in Leelanau County, Julia Wheeler Ludden lives in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Minnesota orgs to support:

- Centro Tyrone Guzman: CentroMN.org/donate
- Neighborhood House: NeighborhoodHouseMN.org/donate

Local Leelanau orgs to support:

- Leelanau Christian Neighbors: Leelanauchristianneighbors.org
- Justice and Peace Advocacy Center: JusticeAndPeaceAdvocacy.org
- Immigration Law and Justice Center: ILJMI.org
- BELONG (Strangers No Longer): StrangersNoLonger.org/belong-north-ern-michigan-immigrant-inclusion-network
- NoMi Neighbor Network (NoMiNn) is a local collective working in solidarity with immigrant neighbors across the greater Grand Traverse region. NoMiNn provides Know Your Rights/Peaceful Observer Training and helps ensure neighbors are supported and not alone during this challenging time. To donate and support their work, visit App.helplink.org/p/g8s3b. This fund offers financial support for basic and essential needs for our vulnerable neighbors.

MUTUAL AID

continues from page 1

coordinate rides for those released on bond from North Lake. Some detainees have been set free at odd times and at an hour’s notice outside the rural facility, with no easy way to travel to Chicago or Detroit, or cities further afield.

“Every day we have volunteers ready to go,” said Samantha. “Someone might pick up a person from the Baldwin facility and drive them to Grand Rapids. Someone else drives them to Michigan City. Then someone else drives them to Chicago. I have three people on my list who need to go to New York, Ohio, or Georgia.”

The sisters estimate they have helped dozens of detainees at North Lake either get home or reconnect with loved ones.

“North Lake welcomes you”

I joined Samantha and her children on a visit to North Lake on the day after Christmas, which turned out to be about two weeks before Fernando was released. The roads south from Traverse City were slick with ice, and a layer of sparkling hoar frost covered the concertina wires above the prison walls so that the facility camouflaged with the wintry forests.

For the Ramirez family the 90-minute visit seemed routine—a weekly ritual. We left our keys, phones, and writing utensils in a locker at the reception desk, walked through several sets of interlocking doors and secure hallways, past a control room with a large dry erase board that listed numbers of detainees, and finally into the reception area, where we sat in white plastic chairs around one of 18 tables. The room’s capacity is 75 people.

A young guard sitting at a desk hesitated for a moment, then leant me a small pen. I put it to use with the tiny notepads I had snuck into the prison in my back pocket.

Fernando was waiting for his daughter and grandchildren with a smile and open arms. He wore a dark blue button-down short-sleeved shirt, blue pants, white socks and blue slippers. The kids stroked his beard before borrowing Samantha’s credit card and visiting the vending machine for Pepsi, peanuts, and chips. The vending machine is usually empty, but today it’s full, said Samantha. Behind us, in the corner of the room, staff had recently added a kids’ play area of

red, blue, yellow and green sponge tiles.

“We talk about everything and nothing” to pass the time inside, Fernando told me. I asked him what message he wanted to share with Americans outside the prison walls.

“I’m not a criminal,” he responded in perfect English after a thoughtful pause. “I have worked hard here for 37 years. This country needs people to drive trucks, to do this work. We contribute to society, we pay taxes, but we don’t get benefits.

“I don’t want to be taken back to Mexico in chains and shackles.”

Samantha jumped into our conversation.

“We were raised to be patriotic, to pledge allegiance to the flag at our school,” she said before her voice trailed off.

Fernando admitted that he cried during and after the first couple weekly visits with his family, but now he had grown used to it. Samantha added that first-time visitors always shed more tears. I glanced around the room and saw a young couple seated across the table from each other, their eyes locked in an emotional trance. Over there a large family shared laughs as an elderly woman told stories. Over here two middle-aged men looked down at the table, as if pondering moves on a chess board.

Samantha said that she recently saw a pregnant woman visiting her partner here, talking through logistics as she prepared to be a single mother.

As the 90 minutes wound down, people around the room rose slowly from their chairs. Fernando grabbed a handful of peanuts from Liam’s bag because he knew their time together was over. He kissed his daughter and grandchildren.

“Bye papa. *Adios*. I got you a Christmas present, but you won’t get it until you leave here,” she said as we left through the interlocking doors.

As we walked down the hallway, the young woman who had shared an intimate moment with her detained partner began to weep. Samantha put an arm around her shoulder and introduced herself in Spanish.

Before we exited into the prison’s reception area, I looked back and saw a dry erase board standing sentinel in a hallway with a map of Michigan’s lower peninsula draw on it, a star over Lake County, and the words “North Lake welcomes you.”

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ICE DANGER

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frozen that connected to the ground,” said Gros. “It floated out, but I still thought the wind would blow the chunk of ice parallel to the shoreline. I wasn’t that worried.”

Suddenly, the ice on which they stood began to disintegrate into smaller chunks.

“I saw that happening and I knew we were in trouble,” said Gros. “I started looking for bigger icebergs that were floating with us. I found one that was six feet wide, but it was further out from the main ice sheet.”

The girls transferred to the intact ice chunk but now found themselves floating 20 feet away from the main pack.

“We were stuck out there,” said Gros. “Twenty minutes later that iceberg we were originally standing on disappeared into nothing. That’s when [our situation] got real.”

Gros said that she and Boos were wearing layers, so they weren’t cold. But they had no way back to the main ice sheet, unless they swam through the frigid waters.

Then they got lucky. A woman in a beach-front condominium at The Homestead resort looked out at the water and saw the girls floating on the iceberg. She happened to be a piano teacher at the Leelanau School. According to Gros, the woman called the Leelanau County sheriff, who called the Coast Guard, who dispatched a helicopter and crew from their Traverse City station toward Sleeping Bear Bay.

Gros estimated they floated for two to three hours. When the sun began to recede in the winter sky, she grew nervous.

The chopper located them and lowered a basket for them to climb into as it hovered overhead.

“It was kind of exhilarating. They hauled us up, and we got to ride in the helicopter and wear headsets on the way back to Traverse City.”

Gros remembered the Coast Guardsmen were upset that that girls’ folly kept them from watching the Super Bowl. (The Los Angeles Raiders beat the defending champion Washington Redskins, 38-9 in the 1984 game.) She also remembered that the *Traverse City Record-Eagle* story the following day was critical of the girls’ decisions that day: Gros’ mother carried a clip of that story with her for years.

The day after their near-death experience, Gros returned to the beach and saw that not a single iceberg was left floating in Sleeping Bear Bay. They had all blown out into Lake Michigan.

“As we would have been if we hadn’t been picked up,” she said.

The Coast Guard later visited the Leelanau School and warned the students about Lake Michigan ice.

“They said that 95 percent of people who are stuck out on the ice like we were don’t come back alive,” said Gros. “We were extremely lucky.”

The story didn’t end there.

Decades later, Gros lived in Everett, Washington—north of Seattle—where she worked as a ranger on Jetty Island. One morning, while waiting for a boat, she struck up a conversation with a Coast Guardsman about maneuvers they conduct to lift people from boats, and the danger of the chopper’s powerful wind downdraft knocking someone into the water. Gros described her experience as a teenager on the Lake Michigan iceberg.

Gros said the Coast Guardsman froze, looked at her and crossed his arms. He responded that he was in the helicopter that day over Sleeping Bear Bay. He was a member of the crew who saved their lives. He remembered that the crew worried their downdraft would flip over the iceberg before the girls could be lifted to safety.

“We really thought you were going to fall into the water,” he told Gros.

Ice temptations

When the water freezes along the shoreline and forms magnificent ice caves, it tempts us to explore and to wonder at mother nature’s creation—despite the obvious dangers.

Thirty years after Karen Gros and Bobbi Boos nearly died in Sleeping Bear Bay, a polar vortex during the winter of 2013-14 froze nearly 94% of Lake Michigan—the highest ice coverage on the lake since recording began in 1973. In February and March, thousands of locals and tourists, alike, flocked to Gill’s Pier near Northport to behold the towering ice caves. Photographer Ken Scott published a stunning book with Leelanau Press on Memorial Day weekend 2014 called *Ice Caves of Leelanau*.

On March 6, 2014, Cherry Republic owner Bob Sutherland and three of his staff, Andrew Pritchard, Andrew Moore and Tom Bisbee, walked the ice from Pyramid Point eight miles



to North Manitou Island—a feat that Bob’s dad Dale and his two brothers had attempted in the 1970s but met open water and turned around.

When the ice caves returned along the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore shoreline during the winter of 2025-26, the spectacle again beckoned us, despite the perils.

As regional media published photos and video of the ice caves, the National Lakeshore and Glen Lake Fire Department issued clear warnings:

“Walking on shelf ice? Hard no!”

Park staff posted on social media on Jan. 30. “Great Lakes shelf ice might look like a winter wonderland, but it’s one of the most dangerous places you can step. This ice is NOT solid. It’s full of cracks and thin areas that can collapse without warning. Waves and currents constantly shift the ice, making it unstable even if it looks safe.

“If you fall through, hypothermia sets in within minutes. Rescue is nearly impossible. ... Admire the ice. Photograph the ice. Don’t walk on the ice; your life depends on it.”

The National Lakeshore posted another warning on Feb. 6: “Admire from a distance—your life depends on it.”

The following day, the Glen Lake Fire Department used Facebook to recommend local winter activities that are less likely to result in frantic 911 calls and potential death.

“It’s a beautiful winter Saturday in Leelanau County. Here’s some recommendations for ways you can enjoy our winter wonderland.

- Sledding at The NPS Dune Climb
- Cross County Ski or Snowshoe the Heritage Tail
- Visit The Homestead Resort for downhill recreation
- Enjoy the area beaches and scenery from the shoreline

Here’s one activity we explicitly advise you not partake in.

RISKING YOUR LIFE ON THE LAKE MICHIGAN SHELF ICE.”

Responding to comments on the Facebook post, Leelanau County Sheriff’s Department dispatcher Ronda Coleman remembered the chaos and dangers posed by crowds flocking to the Gill’s Pier ice caves 12 years ago.

“We had dozens of rescue calls from sprained ankles to cracked skulls to broken hips,” she wrote. “It also puts the responders at risk for the same injuries.

“We fielded hundreds of calls

a day (not exaggerating) asking us if the ice caves were OPEN???? This also took away our ability to mitigate other critical incidents while answering idiotic questions of nature was ‘open.’ No ice is safe ice.”



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LEELANAU COFFEE

continues from page 1

brothers who started Leelanau Coffee so many years ago, are still involved—at least for now.

“John will keep doing his thing, he’s hired on as an employee indefinitely. Steve is on a one-year transition contract,” said Volkema.

Changes, and things that’ll stay the same

“We’ll definitely update the packaging, the website, the store, within the first year,” Volkema said. “But we’re not in a huge rush to do that.”

By no means will those changes be the first that Leelanau Coffee has seen over the years.

When it first opened in 1993, it was housed in a 600-square-foot space on Lake Street, where Cherry Republic is located. In 1998, it moved to where it is now, on Western Avenue.

Production has moved too. Nearly a decade ago, Leelanau Coffee started roasting its beans in Maple City instead of where it had always been, attached to the cafe in Glen Arbor.

Inside the coffee shop, a mural once adorned a wall, as did a bright, “burn your eyes yellow” color, said Miller. It’s now painted a more agreeable, cool blue.

“People come and go, too, but it always seems they find their way back here and work for a spell,” said Miller, whether it’s for a short stint or all summer long.

The Schuil acquisition might also make things internally “a little more structured,” said Miller.

“We get a lot more benefits,” said Carrie Giesler, a Leelanau Coffee barista of roughly eight years.

Employees can now opt-in to health

and life insurance, 401ks and profit sharing.

“There’s even holiday pay,” Giesler added.

Externally, for the Leelanau Coffee customer, few things will change.

A shared emphasis on customer service

“Schuil—and I could sub Leelanau in for this—has been around forever,” Volkema stated.

He emphasized its heritage, bean variety and high quality for the price—all commonalities between the companies.

Of all their similarities, Volkema said the “customer service element” is of utmost importance, which just so happens to be barista Karen McIlvried’s favorite part of the job.

“I live in town, but I’ve met more people working in this coffee shop,” McIlvried said with a laugh. “I really feel like I’ve become part of the community, and that happened here.”

Miller said she’s also met a lot of people at the cafe.

“The hardest part is their names,” she laughed. “I’ll know their order, but not their name. There’s double cap Bill, au lait Sharon.”

Forgotten names aside, the familiar faces of loyal locals are cherished—especially now, in the bowels of winter.

“You’ve got to treat your locals well and look out for them,” said Myles Wall, a Leelanau barista of seven years and new addition to the maintenance team.

“They support us in the dead season,” he said. “They keep this place active in the Dark Ages.”

Come spring and summer, when the ice melts and tourists come north in numbers, some folks make Leelanau Coffee their destination.

“People come from all over the



Leelanau Coffee Roasting Company cafe manager Mara Miller.

world to try our coffee,” said barista Clayton Morrow.

He remembered the time a few Ethiopians came in, which is a country that Leelanau sources some of its beans from. Morrow added that the cafe has historically employed seasonal workers from Mongolia and Turkey as well.

Though much is expected to remain constant through the change in ownership, Sean Ramsdell, a Leelanau Coffee maintenance worker since 2016, said he’ll miss working

for the Arens brothers.

“I’m sad to not work for them anymore, it feels like part of me was taken away,” said Ramsdell. “You know,” he added, “I never drank coffee before working here. Now, I like it.”

“You only just like it?” I challenged. “I love it,” he conceded with a smile. “It feels good to be part of this place.”

“I just hope we keep getting free coffee,” Wall said with a smile.

“Yes, we are,” Miller said.

Empire Winterfest

Saturday, February 21, 2026



Hosted by
Empire Area Community Center
(EACC)

9 AM Yoga at Township Hall, hosted by Jess Shelton

11 AM Ranger Program at Visitors Center, “Island Life: The Story of North Manitou Island”

11 AM - 3 PM Book Sale at Glen Lake Community Library

12:30 - 3 PM Saunas at Empire Beach

1 PM Polar Plunge at Empire Beach

2 - 5 PM Winter Activities at Grocer’s Daughter and Tiffany’s Cafe

2:30 PM Docent led hike at Chippewa Run Conservancy, Parking on Fisher St.

5 - 7 PM Soup Potluck & Music from Charlie Arnett

Bring a soup, salad or dessert to share, BYOB

Join us on February 22, the day after Winterfest, for a pancake breakfast at the Empire Township Hall, hosted by the Empire Lion’s

All Winterfest activities are free to attend, and the event is sponsored by the Empire Area Community Center (EACC). Events are weather-permitting; view the online schedule for weather-related updates. A freewill offering will be taken during the potluck to support EACC’s general fund, which is invested back into the community through events like this one. For more details, including a full schedule of events, visit empireareacommunitycenter.org

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