



Former Gilchrist Winery cooks Jackson, Tootla compete on Bravo TV's "Top Chef"

By Jacob Wheeler
Sun editor

Leland resident and former Gilchrist Farm Winery chef Jennifer Lee Jackson found herself once again in the racetrack pit during the opening episode of "Top Chef"—just as when she cooked burgers and fried chicken sandwiches as a teenager at the racetrack her father operated in rural Georgia.

But this time she honed her craft in front of hundreds of thousands who watched her on television. Jackson and her partner, Detroit native Justin Tootla, are competing in Season 23 of the popular Bravo show, which premiered on television on Monday, March 9 (some watched the opening episode the previous week on Peacock or YouTube). The 75-minute show typically runs 14-16 weeks. "Top Chef: Carolinas" was filmed between August and October 2025 in locations around Charlotte, North Carolina, and Greenville, South Carolina.

Described as "life partners," Jackson and Tootla are among 15 contestants, who notably also include twin brothers Brandon and Jonathan Dearden. The winner of "Top Chef" earns \$250,000, a feature in *Food & Wine*, an appearance at the annual Food & Wine Classic in Aspen, and a chance to cook at the historic

James Beard House in New York City.

Competing on the show "was so much harder than we thought it would be," Tootla told the *Glen Arbor Sun* in February. "We've been huge fans of the show and have watched it since Season 1. For 20 years we've played 'Monday morning quarterback,' judging contestants as much as they were judged on the show.

"But when you're in the mix, when the clock starts and you're cooking, it's intense! Being in other people's kitchens, you have to adapt on the fly."

"Top Chef" has attracted fans for two decades with its spotlight on culinary competition and its diverse array of up-and-coming cooks. At least one chef is typically eliminated from the show during each episode, creating a high-stakes drama. Contestants have taken advantage of the exposure to open restaurants, write cookbooks and emerge as culinary leaders.

While the show's producers keep its content secret before it airs, the *Greenville News* reported that Season 23 "includes visits to the region's mountains, lakes, and rivers, as well as activities such as ziplining, white-water rafting, and a visit to a farm that grows some of the world's hottest peppers"—dubbed the Carolina Reaper.

During the Quickfire Challenge under a broil-

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Photo by Carter Leach

Jennifer Jackson and Justin Tootla reflect after harvesting ramps at Gilchrist Farm. The Top Chef contestants, who live in Leland, cooked at Gilchrist from August 2024 until December 2025.

Voices and Visions: Women artists declare "We will not whisper"

By Katie Dunn
Sun contributor

"It was the 1960s and I could not act like everything was okay. I couldn't paint landscapes in the 1960s—there was too much going on."

—Faith Ringgold (1930–2024), pioneering American artist, author, and activist.

For Ringgold, the turbulence of the 1960s made remaining neutral impossible. The era's upheavals—the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement, and the rise of women's liberation—forced a reckoning for many artists. Ringgold moved beyond purely aesthetic concerns and toward work that directly engaged with the political realities unfolding around her.

Ringgold's refusal to "act like everything was okay" feels uncannily contemporary. Her words land square-

ly in present-day America—a time marked by rising authoritarianism, assaults on reproductive rights, threats to LGBTQ+ communities, pervasive gun violence, environmental instability, the humanitarian crisis surrounding migration, and now, an escalating global conflict in the Middle East.

For women in particular, art has long been a vehicle for confronting gendered, social, or political marginalization. Across generations, women have used storytelling, language, the body, performance, and self-representation to make experiences previously overlooked visible.

Think: the collective activism of the Guerrilla Girls (founded in 1985), an anonymous feminist group challenging sexism and racism in the art world; the provocative, text-based interventions of Jenny Holzer (b. 1950); the identity-driven photographic tableaux of Cindy Sherman (b. 1954); the psychologi-



Margo Burian's "We Know the Truth, We Saw It with Our Own Eyes" memorializes Alex Pretti, a VA nurse who was killed by federal officers in Minneapolis on Jan. 24.

cally charged portraiture of Alice Neel (1900–1984); the autobiographical symbolism of Frida Kahlo (1907–1954); the multimedia storytelling and performance of Laurie Anderson (b. 1947); and the incisive explorations of race, gender, and power by Kara Walker (b. 1969).

This tradition of female conscience is not confined to art history. It persists today, urgent and uncompromising, manifest in the work of a cohort of women artists here in northern Michigan, presented in the exhibition: *We Will Not Whisper*.

Margo Burian's Leadership

The refusal to retreat from uncomfortable truths inspired Margo Burian, a Leelanau-based multidisciplinary artist, to conceive *We Will Not Whisper*. Renowned for her mastery of landscape painting, Burian shifted her creative

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Power to the books: nonprofit spreads literacy

By Ross Boissoneau
Sun contributor

An idea born in Suttons Bay has spread across the state. In just 10 years, Kara Gregory's PoWeR! Book Bags program has grown from concept to some 130 sites in more than one third of Michigan's counties. It has distributed more than 750,000 books and 120,000 PoWeR! Literacy Bags.

When Gregory moved to the area, she volunteered at the Salvation Army Center for a holiday meal. "I showed up with six kids. Nobody knew me," Gregory recalls. When she asked how they could help, she was told they could set the table. That didn't take long, and she then asked, "So now can we decorate?"

There was some scrap paper in a shoebox behind the desk with a sign that said, "Give to

children while they wait." So, Gregory and her kids went to work. "We made snowflakes, paper chains" and more, she says.

That night she had an epiphany. As a former teacher, professor and textbook author, she knew that a one-time event wouldn't lead to any lasting change. "To change lives, you need to do things over and over and over," she says.

That is a challenge for populations where children and families may have to move frequently. She came up with the idea of giving away books, and not just books but other creative tools, along with a bag to keep them in.

Thus was born PoWeR! Literacy Bags. PoWeR! stands for Play, Write, Read, all activities designed to elevate children's language skills and literacy.

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Billy Joel's backing band plays Leelanau Sands Casino

By Ross Boissoneau
Sun contributor

When Billy Joel was creating his hit records in the '70s and '80s, he wasn't working by himself. While he wrote the bulk of the material and sang and played piano, he also led a band of top-flight musicians.

Now The Lords of 52nd Street, featuring members of those recordings and tours, are performing Joel's music, including a stop at Leelanau Sands Casino March 20. Guitarist Russell Javors says playing the music again with those who helped create it was a full-circle moment for him. "Lib and I have played together since we were kids, and with Doug since before Billy," he says of drummer Liberty DeVitto and bassist Doug Stegmeyer.

After recording his first albums mostly with studio musicians, then taking another group out on the road, Joel moved back to New York City and began looking for a group of musicians who could bring the energy of the city to his music.

Bassist Stegmeyer was the only member of his touring group Joel kept onboard. He eventually brought in Javors and DeVitto, his friends from Topper, the band they'd formed years earlier. Stegmeyer's brother Al was a sound engineer and recommended saxophonist Richie Cannata.

When Cannata joined the other four, the musical sparks generated all those hits. Javors says it all goes back to the chemistry and attitude the members of the band brought to the recordings all those years ago. "We brought that chemistry to Billy."

The quintet recorded *Turnstiles* before working with Joel and producer Phil Ramone on *The Stranger*. That's when the two dubbed the band "The Lords of 52nd Street." Next up was the album *52nd Street*. The hits were huge – "Just The Way You Are," "Only The Good

Die Young," "New York State Of Mind," "Movin' Out," "Big Shot" and more.

Fast forward a few decades, and the band had dispersed as Joel searched for other sounds and inspirations. After leaving Joel's band, they performed with an array of stars, together or singly, including Paul McCartney, Rick Wakeman, Karen Carpenter, Phoebe Snow, Stevie Nicks, the Beach Boys and more.

It wasn't until the group's induction into the Long Island Music Hall of Fame that they played together again as a unit, and they enjoyed it so much they regrouped sans Joel and Stegmeyer, who died in 1995. Together again, the three recruited a pianist and lead vocalist to fill the role of Joel, along with a bassist, a keyboardist and a guitarist. They play for crowds still hungry for the music Javors says they tell him is "the soundtrack to their lives."

They play faithful renditions of the music the group made famous along with some other gems they've discovered along the way. "We cover the gamut. We switch it up," says Javors, who creates the set lists.

Javors praises the members of the band, noting they're all successful musicians and solo artists in their own right. "These guys are all the real deal," Javors says. "It's such a kick-ass band, but not show-offs. The songs always rule."

It's evident from the enthusiasm in Javors's voice that he's thrilled to be back on the road with his pals, making music that for them and the audience is timeless. "The highlight is always the guys. When we were kids this is what we wanted to do.

"For a bunch of old guys we have the same amount of energy," Javors says. "Liberty is still pounding the hell out of the drums. You'll be amazed. We're still playing with the same intensity and energy."

For tickets or more information, go to leelanausandscasino.com/events and scroll down to the Lords of 52nd Street.



Glen Lake Woman's Club Art Fair vendor deadline nears

From staff reports

March 22 is the deadline to submit a vendor application for the Glen Lake Woman's Club Art Fair. The Art Fair will be held on July 15 at the Glen Arbor Township Hall. This annual, juried Art Fair features artists carefully selected to represent one-of-a kind art pieces for sale at the Township Hall. The Art Fair features artisans in many mediums including pottery, painting, textiles, woodworking, and jewelry.

Vendors can register at <https://www.zapplication.org/event-info.php?ID=12899> or click on our website, GlenArbor.com for a direct link. For more information, contact glwcartfair@gmail.com or call (231) 412-0214.



Community Calendar: Upcoming March events in Leelanau County

March 13-14: Glen Arbor Arts Center hosts Watercolor Skill Building: Garden Blossoms, 10 am-3:30 pm

Saturday, March 14: Glen Arbor's St Patrick's Day Pub Crawl, 1-7 pm

Wednesday, March 18: Glen Lake Library in Empire hosts Greeting Card Workshop, 1 pm

Saturday, March 21: Glen Lake Library in Empire hosts Nature Sketching & Journaling, 10 am

Thursday, March 26: Glen Lake Library in Empire hosts screening of *The Search for Anna & Levi*, 6:30 pm

March 20-May 28: Glen Arbor Arts Center hosts 2026 Members Create exhibit

• Trivia Night at Cherry Public House, Sundays, 5-7 pm

• Euchre at Glen Arbor Wines Wednesdays, 6-8 pm, January through April

• Stories & More for Preschoolers, Glen Lake Library, Fridays at 11 am

• Youth Ice Fishing Program at Sleeping Bear Dune Climb, Saturdays, 11-3

• Glen Arbor Arts Center hosts Lobby Gallery: Small Accomplishments by Harvey Gordon, Jan. 5-April 23; Interiors, Jan. 9-March 12; Inside The Outside, Feb. 6-April 23; Inside The Outside, Feb. 6-April 23

Recycling is located at nine locations throughout Leelanau County, including at the ball fields in Empire, at the Leelanau School north of Glen Arbor and a Glen Lake School.

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Glen Arbor designated as Tree City USA

From staff reports

Glen Arbor earned the designation of Tree City USA, by the Arbor Day Foundation in late February. A small, but persistent, group of local business owners and residents decided that it was time to ensure Glen Arbor's recognition of trees as being crucial to the natural beauty of the small town's scenic corridor/backdrop and the globally rare ecology of the surrounding Glen Lake and Crystal River watersheds. They worked for over a year to gain community support and build a coalition, the Glen Arbor Beautification committee (GAB), and meet the standards of the Arbor Day Foundation.

Martin Kimpston, a native Nebraskan, Glen Arbor resident/business owner and GAB member, inspired the initiative to seek Tree City USA designation, by realizing that "nearly every town in Nebraska, small and large, is designated a Tree City USA due to the Arbor Foundation being in Lincoln, NB." Martin went on to reference the Village of Northport, at the tip of Leelanau County as another small town with Tree City USA status located close-by. "It just made sense and seemed very simple, if Northport can be a Tree City, then so can Glen Arbor".

With that, the GAB saw the Tree City USA designation as a way forward to instill a sense of pride in the Glen Arbor community of business-owners and residents for keeping and maintaining the existing trees and forests, while finding ways to plant additional trees in the area. GAB founding member Rebecca Benedict, also a Glen Arbor resident and HQ Executive Assistant at Cherry Republic, stated that "In a place where Lake Michigan meets forest canopy, stewardship isn't optional – it's essential. Achieving Tree City USA status signals that Glen Arbor is committed not only to preserving our natural heritage, but to leading with intention in how we care for our environment."

Another GAB founding member, Kait Springsdorf, who is also a Glen Arbor resident and an manager of the Crystal River Recreation District/M-22 Store in Glen Arbor, is excited to gather support from local businesses and organizations with GAB's endeavors. "My natural resources (Sustainable Parks, Recreation & Tourism) background from Michigan State University gives me the knowledge to know that this initiative will have positive impacts on the Glen Lake Association's watershed work, the Conservation Resource Alliance's work on the Crystal River and businesses that rely on these recreational assets in Northern Michigan".

To achieve this milestone, GAB consulted with regional foresters and the Michigan DNR liaison to the Arbor Foundation/ Urban and Community Forester/Partnership Coordinator, Lawrence Law. Law makes the point that, "Glen



The Glen Arbor Beautification committee planted 20 seedlings last Nov. 6, on the back property of The River Club with owner Mike Sheldon's approval and support.

Arbor being recognized as a Tree City USA is important because no matter the size of the community, we need to reward and celebrate the great work of those who take care of our community trees and the natural environment around us. It's Glen ARBOR not Glen Concrete. Taking the steps to be awarded this honor demonstrates how good a place Glen Arbor is at identifying and maintaining what makes their area great. It's proactive, smart, and inspiring management from a smaller Michigan community that we are proud to assist."

GAB founding member, Chris Sack, stated that, "Glen Arbor is surrounded by Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore and the amazing forest ecosystem that it provides. It is easy to take the presence of trees and forests on our private property for granted as we develop these lands for both business and residential purposes. What we are doing, however, is slowly stripping away the very thing that makes us fall in love with Glen Arbor, Glen Lake and the Crystal River watershed!"

Sack continues, "I have enjoyed the livelihood that my business, Great Lakes Tea & Spice, has provided in Glen Arbor for 20 years, and it is always a balance between conserving the thing that makes a place amazing and beautiful, and not loving it to death."

"Glen Arbor is called Glen ARBOR because of its trees. Keeping the Arbor in Glen Arbor means literally everything to Glen Arbor." Sack insists. "This will be our tagline going forward."

GAB looks to be a resource for educating community members about trees and forests and the direct and indirect value they provide. They have consulted and will continue to consult with the tree and forest health specialists at Schillinger's Tree Doctor and local arborists

to develop a plan that will optimize the visual beauty of the trees in town and help them thrive well into the future.

GAB is also working steadfast to provide a vision and blue-print for a "Future Glen Arbor"

GAB's first official tree plantings took place at The River Club in agreement with its owner-founder, Mike Sheldon, in November 2025. Sheldon had the following to say, "As business leaders in Glen Arbor we benefit from those who came before us. Continuing to beautify our community today is a great way of paying it forward." GAB is hoping to partner with organizations like the Glen Lake Garden Club and Glen Arbor Art Center in their efforts to develop this vision of a future Glen Arbor that considers the many stakeholders in the community. Several businesses, including Northwoods Hardware, Glen Arbor B&B and Cherry Republic, have offered their support in the planning and planting process. In the summer of 2025, GAB also planted black willow trees cloned from Michigan's champion black willow by the Archangel Ancient Tree Archive and Glen Lake Community School's students.

GAB plans to celebrate Arbor Day this Spring with more tree plantings at Cherry Republic and other spaces in and around Glen Arbor's business district/scenic corridor. Activities aim to include educational sessions with information for locals from knowledgeable sources.

To contact the Glen Arbor Beautification committee, please email at info@gabeautification.org.

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— Gretchen Knoblock, New Leaf Interiors

"We would not have known about the (Bicentennial Barn on M-22) if it wasn't for the article you published in August 2024. I was at The Homestead while on vacation and came across the article while waiting on a pizza. That started our interest in purchasing the property."
— Sam Stone, new owner of Bicentennial Farm, which was listed by LVR Realty

WHISPER

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practice to meet the demands of the moment. She also invited 20 women artists to partake in the same endeavor. For this exhibition, they temporarily set aside practices once focused primarily on aesthetics or personal expression. The result: work that serves as witness, protest, and resistance.

“In early January 2025, I ran across an article on CNN reporting that Meta [parent company of Facebook and Instagram] had removed ‘guardrails’ preventing hate speech targeting women, people of color, and LGBTQ+ communities,” Burian says. “I began discussing this with other women artists, and as the full implications of Project 2025 became clear, it felt urgent to respond visually to these issues—environmental, voter rights, women’s autonomy, immigration, and civil rights among them.”

Responding to Burian’s call, the participating artists, based in Leelanau County and across Michigan, explore painting, collage, assemblage, fiber, and mixed media. The exhibition features Kathleen Bechtel, Sarah Bearup-Neal, Carrie Betlyn-Eder, Shanny Brooke, Elaine Dalcher, Christy DeHoog Johnson, Tracey Easthope, Liz Berick Fall, Lori Feldpausch, Lauren Everett Finn, Mary Fortuna, Megan Kellner, Jessica Kovan, Nancy McRay, Wendy Kay McWhorter, Kathy Mohl, Shanna Robinson, Barb Schilling, Mallory Shotwell, and Nikki Wall.

Assembling 21 artists around urgent political themes required moral courage and trust. Much of the invitation to participate evolved organically, fostering a network of mutual support among the artists involved. Burian emphasizes that for many of the exhibitors, herself included, the work represents a departure from their typical creative practice.

“For many of us, myself included, our artistic practices have largely focused on creating images of calm and serenity,” she shares. “Events over the past year have been anything but calm. Creating art—especially in times of distress—gives us a visual voice and a tangible way to process events as they unfold, while also offering a different perspective.”

Burian further underscores that making this an all-women exhibition was intentional.

“So much of Project 2025 seems to target women’s civil and humanitarian rights,” she observes. “It made sense that the voices responding to these issues should come specifically from women artists.”

The Alluvion as Ideal Venue

Designed by and for artists, The Alluvion in Traverse City is a space where visual art, music, and community dialogue converge. For *We Will Not Whisper*, it proves especially apt: its openness and commitment to creative exchange allow

the works to be experienced with the immediacy and intensity they demand.

Jessica Kooiman Parker, the gallery’s Visual Arts Curator, explains that, “Authentically supporting artists—their vision and freedom to express themselves—is the core of my curatorial practice. Witnessing these artists create a collective commentary on current events was very inspiring. Artists play a vital role in reflecting our world back to us through the lens of their experience and perspective—whether that is heartbreak, rage or peace.”

Opening Reception

The opening reception on March 7 drew a robust audience. The work confronted the moment with unflinching clarity, and the room carried a palpable seriousness, far from the casual curiosity of a typical art opening. Each piece stood boldly, defiantly and gracefully, demanding acknowledgment. The energy was not celebratory but collective, introspective, and deeply present.

Among those attending the reception was Florina Kapitzke of Traverse City, who reflected on the emotional and political depth of the exhibition.

“A man [at the reception] said, ‘There’s a lot of angry women in this room.’ I asked him, ‘If the collection was a group of male artists would you use the same adjectives?’ He seemed puzzled... Since the ‘90s the media has found it easy to pigeonhole women into convenient, but inaccurate places,” Kapitzke says. “Feminazis, man-hating, anti-family. I see more than just angry... These artists aren’t just angry. And if it’s anger, it is justified anger. Righteous... I see a range of emotions—anger sure, but disappointment, sadness, patriotism, fear, outrage, dignity, purpose, feminine power, vigilance, empathy, maternal awareness. They are refusing to ignore the calling of their purpose. Art IS political.”

Highlights from Exhibit

Every work in *We Will Not Whisper* amplifies to the exhibition’s urgency and power. While space allows only a glimpse of 21 artists and their offerings, the works highlighted here serve not as “best” or “more important,” but as entry points into the exhibition’s central themes: resilience, resistance, and unyielding voice.

Carrying the Mantel: Margo Burian

If the exhibition has an animating force, it is Burian.

She contributes three works to the exhibition, each part of her ongoing *Fractured* series, which examines the erosion of societal and institutional norms.

Quiet, Piggy focuses on Bloomberg News journalist Catherine Lucey, who was publicly disparaged during a 2025 presidential press exchange. Through fractured image transfers, collage, and paint, Burian dismantles and reas-

**Quiet, Piggy**

sembles Lucey’s visage, transforming a moment of public humiliation into endurance and testimony.

My Name is Rachel confronts the erasure of Admiral Rachel Levine’s legal name from an official portrait, responding to hostility directed at the first openly transgender four-star admiral in the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps. Burian’s fragmented imagery exposes precisely how identity can be publicly contested and diminished.

We Know the Truth, We Saw It with Our Own Eyes memorializes Alex Pretti, an intensive care nurse for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, who was fatally shot by U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers in Minneapolis on Jan. 24, during an immigration enforcement action. The splintered imagery captures both the brutality of the moment and the competing narratives surrounding the event.

Shanny Brooke—The Emotional Fracture

For Shanny Brooke, painting has long been “how I work out personal issues, process grief or anger, or just find a way to express a memory from my childhood. It’s cathartic.” But in the current political climate, that catharsis has shifted. The ordinary rhythms of her practice have been interrupted by a persistent sense that everything is not, in fact, okay.

**My Name is Rachel**

Her contribution, *What If Everything Does Work Out?*, holds that tension in place. The central female figure appears exhausted, yet not defeated, suspended between despair and fragile hope. “I find myself feeling complete hopelessness one day... then another day seeing tiny little glimmers of hope,” Brooke reflects. “It’s those glimmers that keep us still being able to get up each day and navigate our daily lives.”

Her painting does not resolve that oscillation but honors it. In doing so, Brooke quietly echoes Ringgold’s insistence that there are moments in history when neutrality becomes impossible—or complicit.

Lori Feldpausch—Truth Destabilized

If Brooke’s work conveys emotional disruption, Lori Feldpausch addresses epistemological collapse—the destabilization of truth itself.

In *Drowning in Disinformation*, Feldpausch turns to Ophelia from *Hamlet* as both muse and metaphor. Historically archetypal of vulnerability and constrained agency, Ophelia becomes, in Feldpausch’s hands, a contemporary figure overwhelmed by misinformation and political chaos.

Partially submerged in water, harkening to the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool, and wrapped in the American flag, Feldpausch’s Ophelia drifts as monuments burn on the horizon and protest signs sink beneath the surface. “My concept deals with how we are drowning in disinformation and living in an echo chamber,” Feldpausch shares.

Wendy McWhorter—Grief Stitched into Form

Gun violence enters the exhibition through the intimate language of family and memory.

In *Torn, Mend, and Resilient Hearts*, Wendy McWhorter transforms century-old quilt fragments from her grandmother into a garment that reads as both memorial and armor. The torn hearts stitched into the surface evoke the lives lost to rampant gun violence, and the families left bereaved. “The torn hearts literally express visually the gun death victims, as well as all those grieving these victims,” she explains. “The red ties represent what we do to try to mend our broken hearts.”

The language is domestic—fabric, thread, heirloom—but the message is civic. Private grief becomes public witness.

Mary Fortuna—Displacement and Rage

Where McWhorter channels mourning, Mary Fortuna channels fury.

In *Tears of Rage*, Fortuna transforms wool felt, linen, embroidery beads, horsehair, and feathers into a hand-stitched mask that feels both ceremonial and confrontational. The work responds

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BOOKS

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The bags contain interactive materials such as finger puppets, crayons, writing booklets, and bookmarks, along with age-appropriate books.

The initial steps were a bit less sophisticated. “I was sewing these bags, and I don’t sew,” Gregory says with a laugh.

She says this was an inducement for others. When she approached people about helping and they would protest that they didn’t sew, she would show them her early efforts. The response: “Oh, I can do *that*.”



What those initial bags lacked in aesthetics they made up for in their contents and the impact they had. The organization initially purchased used books and cleaned them up so the children could feel they had something of their own that was valuable. Over time, the bagmakers became more skilled, and the organization gained enough funding to begin purchasing new books. Gregory, who has an extensive background in child development and early childhood education, including a Ph.D., says research shows that giving children new books rather than used ones gives them a sense of self-importance. “It feels like (they’re) first-class,” she says.

Today the bags only contain new books, but at events the volunteers take some of the many used books they have collected along with them. Children can get a new book and then pick from the used books as well. “Kids can choose their own book,” she says.

Gregory says there were many times, especially in the early years, when the program could have folded. But thanks to the perseverance of the organization’s many volunteers and continuing funding from a variety of sources, it has managed not only to survive, but to thrive. From its initial three sites, the Salvation Army,

Immaculate Conception Church Food Pantry and Leelanau Christian Neighbors, it soon expanded beyond Leelanau and Grand Traverse Counties.

Today the PoWER! Book Bags are available at numerous sites, including food and baby pantries, playgroups, preschools, childcare centers, schools, health departments and WIC distribution centers. Locally, other sites include Generations Ahead, Women’s Resource Center and the Children’s Advocacy Center.

“Wherever people are helping children,” says Gregory.

While most of the locations are in northern lower Michigan, there are now sites in Western and southeastern Michigan. “I didn’t expect Muskegon or Detroit. It just happened. They were persistent. I said no. They said yes.

“They said, ‘If we do all the work, can it happen?’ It was my old teaching partner.” So, she gave in.

It’s likely the organization isn’t done expanding. Gregory says there has been talk of adding locations in the Upper Peninsula. “Deliveries are the big thing. We have to brave the ugly roads of Michigan in the winter.”

Of course, with an organization as far-flung as PoWER! Book Bags, not

all the volunteers could make it to the 10th anniversary celebration. Still, Gregory says 35 people attended the celebration, which was for her a pleasant surprise. “I didn’t expect that many people. A lot of our volunteers are out of town,” she explains.

A few things have changed over that decade. “Now the bags are gorgeous,” Gregory says with a laugh. Beyond that, the organization has codified its programs into three main headings: Little Learners (programs for children pre-natal-age 5), School Vacation Literacy Give-Aways, and Community Programs. Funding comes directly from donors, as noted on the organization’s website, and as a certified non-profit it is eligible for grants from numerous sources.

What hasn’t changed over the years is the program’s dedication to improving the lives of recipients.

“Our goals are to continue our work with our partners to share the joy of language and literacy with children and families while promoting interactions and connection,” says Gregory. “We are focusing this year and beyond on making our materials more impactful through added book interaction prompts, sample videos, and increased family engagement through play opportunities.”

WHISPER

concludes from page 4

to escalating Immigration and Customs Enforcement actions, violent reprisals against dissent, and the spread of false narratives, what Fortuna describes as “the unceasing barrage of daily horrors unfolding in the country.” Although political content had not typically defined her practice, in 2025 she felt compelled to respond.

The mask becomes an emblem of dissent, not passive but alert, not decorative but declarative.

Liz Barrick Fall—The Body Legislated

The stakes of Project 2025 become most visceral in Liz Barrick Fall’s *Modern American Gestation Accessory*.

A pregnant torso and uterus, reconfigured from a vintage anatomical model, is pinned to red velvet with insect specimen pins and enclosed within a metal box. Jail cell bars run through the uterus itself. “I placed jail cell bars within the uterus... to emphasize the objectification and subjugation women are being forced to endure,” Barrick Fall explains.

Drawing on her own experience as a mother of four who once required life-saving reproductive care, Barrick Fall underscores what is at risk when women’s bodily autonomy is restricted. The work is not metaphor alone; it is personal history made structural critique.

Kathy Mohl—Sacred Witness

From the legal constraints imposed on women, the exhibition turns toward their spiritual reclamation.

In *She Knows the Way*, Kathy Mohl reimagines Mary Magdalene, a figure historically silenced, demonized, or misunderstood, as a symbol of guidance and perseverance. Magdalene’s body merges with a tree, her torso forming the trunk, within which a jar of oil and a skull are embedded, while arms branch outward. Beneath her, a cracked path sprouts blossoms, fragile signs of life and renewal breaking through. The iconography suggests transformation and the delicate emergence of new life.

“Art is not only what we see, but what we feel,” Mohl says. “If viewers pause and see or feel something in a new way, then the painting has done its work.”

Barb Schilling—The Figure Rising

In *I Dreamt I Was Free*, Barb Schilling paints a female figure rising from a thorned rose bush, lifting a glowing orb. The composition evokes two of art history’s most iconic female figures: Sandro Botticelli’s *The Birth of Venus* (1484–1486) and Eugène Delacroix’s *Liberty Leading the People* (1830), celebrating women as enduring symbols of courage, moral clarity, and presence.

Schilling describes her practice as rooted in contemporary impressionist painting, translating emotional and social experience into “states of being—resilience, autonomy, and the quiet refusal to disappear.” Here, resistance is framed not as aggression, but as triumph.



Carrie Betlyn-Eder

Carrie Betlyn-Eder—Mobilize

We Will Not Whisper culminates in Carrie Betlyn-Eder’s assemblage *Mobilize*, a hanging mobile and one of three found-object sculptures she presented for the exhibition. Constructed from tissue paper, cardboard, glue, a plastic fan

cover, curly willow, wooden stars, and a three-minute timer, the suspended piece unites four interconnected female forms, their bodies rising in sharp, headless silhouettes while strands of willow and flower-like elements cascade beneath them. The work balances fragility and force. As Betlyn-Eder observes, “The work sings together,” embodying the solidarity of women, both universally and in this chorus of 21 female artists.

We Will Not Whisper remains on view through April 11. A public panel discussion on March 31 offers visitors the opportunity to engage directly with the artists, witness their convictions, and leave inspired to mobilize.

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TOP CHEF

continues from page 1

ing sun and 90-degree temperatures at the Charlotte Motor Speedway in the opening episode, chefs were split into teams of three and told they could cook anything—but only in the time it takes a racecar to complete 23 laps around the track, typically about 11.5 minutes.

“As the cars whip around the speedway, the chefs sprint between cutting boards and burners, trying to stay steady while plating only in the final laps,” writes Food & Wine Magazine.

Jackson was part of the winning Blue team that made a crab and shrimp

hushpuppy with harissa aioli and a napa cabbage and peach salad, earning each of them a cash prize of \$5,000.

Both she and Tootla survived the elimination challenge, which featured guests using sweet potatoes, North Carolina’s official state vegetable. Fellow contestant Day Anais Joseph was eliminated on week 1, reportedly because both her fish and sweet potatoes were undercooked and her herbes de provence overpowered the dish.

Prior to “Top Chef,” Jackson got to know the Carolinas during road trips her family would take when she was young. However, she admitted to feeling nervous about the added pressure of “cooking straight-up southern food,” which she hadn’t done since those days in the pit of her dad’s racetrack.

Breathing up north

Jackson and Tootla served as consulting chefs at Gilchrist from August 2024 until December 2025. Connoisseurs flocked to the Suttons Bay restaurant for their locally sourced dishes, including the popular chicken schnitzel topped with a Caesar salad—sourced with chicken from Anavery Farm, romaine lettuce from Loma or Lakeview and aged raclette from Leelanau Cheese.

According to co-owner Elizabeth Huntoon, the duo was known for their creativity. “They did a great job of utilizing our Gilchrist market garden produce as well as other local sources,” she said.

Prior to landing in northern Michigan, Jackson and Tootla worked at acclaimed restaurants including Voyager in Ferndale and launched Bunny Bunny in Detroit’s Eastern Market. They met at the Culinary Institute of America and have worked for major restaurants in New York.

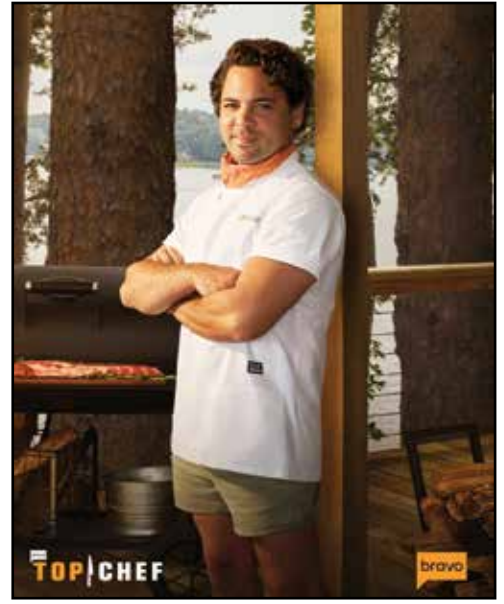
Tootla visited Charlevoix as a child and worked as camp counselor in Kalkaska. “Being up north was part of my life before I could walk,” he said.

After graduating from culinary school, he moved into an old family cottage in Beulah and worked at Mission Table on Traverse City’s Old Mission Peninsula. Tootla convinced Jackson to take a layover on her way to Alaska.

“I took her around. She saw the Great Lakes for the first time, and she fell in love with it.”

Jackson admitted that she cried the first time she saw Lake Michigan.

“I felt like it was home for me,” she



said. “Every time we go downstate now, I feel like I can breathe again when we come back up north.”

Jackson and Tootla received a phone call from Gilchrist after holding a Bunny Bunny pop-up event at The Little Fleet in Traverse City in November 2022. They closed Bunny Bunny in June 2024 and relocated to Suttons Bay later that summer.

“We loved what Gilchrist was doing with their farm-to-table ethos, their regenerative farm and growing and processing their own grapes for the restaurant,” said Tootla.

Establishing relationships with local farmers became part of their learning curve.

“When we worked in bigger cities, vendors would show up at our door, or it was pretty easy to pick up a phone,” said Tootla. “But it’s the opposite up north. We’d call up a farmer who either sold meat or vegetables. They were insistent that they wanted to meet us in person at the farm before they’d let us use their products.”

“We spent most of our first week driving around the [region] meeting farmers.”

Jackson and Tootla adjusted to the ebb and flow of the seasons and reacted to meet customers’ requests.

“All the chefs and restaurants up here work with the same produce and finding ways to be creative under seasonal constraints,” said Tootla. Diners at Gilchrist “wanted a burger on the menu, so we had fun sourcing it top to bottom with ingredients from the County.”

“Once June hit, [the sizes of the dining crowds] were insane.”

Friendships on the show

Jackson and Tootla bonded with other contestants on “Top Chef” and may plan a dinner event somewhere in the South within the next year—potentially Houston.

“While it is a competition and someone has to win, we checked in with the other chefs on a daily basis,” said Tootla. “The text thread between us was constant.”

That bond surprised Jackson. “The friendships we made on the show was definitely a highlight,” she said. “We didn’t expect that to happen.”

No plans have solidified yet for their next food venture up north, but ideas are flowing. They may hold an event around the Summer Solstice at Parcel, a seven-acre plot with two Scandinavian-inspired cabins near Little Traverse Lake.

The chefs are regulars at Farm Club and enjoy the classic “supper clubby, throw-back restaurants” such as Fischer’s Happy Hour Tavern and the Manitou Restaurant in Benzie County. They also love martinis at the V.I. Grill in Suttons Bay.

Above all, Jackson and Tootla are happy to call Leland home.



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Sugar Moon's Maple Sugar

By Sandy Bradshaw
Sun contributor

It's that time of year again as many in northern Michigan, including here in Leelanau County, begin tapping the maple trees to reap their golden harvest.

As Old Man Winter fades, maple trees offer us the first gift of the season—a pure, golden sap which through lots of hard work is transformed into the rich, sweet syrup beloved by many. The 2025, U.S. maple syrup industry produced 5.7 million gallons according to the USDA statistics service. Until the 1930s, the United States produced most of the world's maple syrup but has been surpassed by Canada during the 1990's with that country now producing more than 80% of the world's maple syrup.

It wasn't until the Civil War that the maple syrup industry was born. Most early producers were dairy farmers who made maple syrup and maple sugar for their own use and for extra income.

Technology remained much the same for the next century until the energy crisis of the 1970s forced maple syrup producers to change to a less labor-intensive process. They designed long tubing systems taking the sap directly from the tree to the sugarhouse. Vacuum pumps were introduced to the tubing systems, pre-heaters were developed to "recycle" heat lost in the steam, and reverse-osmosis filters were designed and added to take a portion of the water out of the sap before it was boiled.

These technological advances continue today, ever moving the story of maple syrup production forward. But for those of us who want to produce maple syrup from the trees in our own backyard, it is a much less complicated process.

Here in Michigan, maple syrup is the first farm crop to be harvested each year and is the oldest agricultural enterprise in the country. Michigan ranks fifth in maple syrup production in the U.S. and produced more than 200,000 gallons in 2023 and is one of the few agricultural crops in which demand exceeds supply.

Tapping Maple trees for their sap began long before Europeans settled in America. Early origins of maple sugaring are preserved in oral traditions of Anishinaabeg and other tribes of northern Michigan and northeastern North America. The Anishinaabe people began the deep connection to the tradition and referred to the season as *Ziinzibaakwadoke Giizis* (Sugar Moon). They made Maple sugar, rather than syrup, due to its ease of storage and transport. Maple sugar was used

as a natural sweetener in many of their dishes. It also held cultural significance in their ceremonies and trade.

When European settlers arrived in the northeastern United States, after tasting the sweet Native American's maple sugar, they learned how to make it themselves, and those early methods are still used today by some family-owned sugar bushes (maple tree groves) around northern Michigan.

Alexander Henry, a British trader at Fort Michilimackinac, was one of the first to describe the Anishinaabeg method of sugar making. He recorded the following as he recalled a visit to an Ojibwe encampment near Sault St. Marie:

"For many centuries, Native American families moved each spring from small winter hunting camps to groves of maple trees. There, they gathered and processed their first plant-based food of the year; harvesting maple sap and boiling it into sweet, maple sugar. To get maple sugar, Native Americans put their collected sap into wide, shallow bark vessels and left them out to freeze. The freezing process separated the water from the sugar, and they would then remove the ice. Native Americans started building 'sugar bushes.' They boiled the sap with hot stones. When European settlers arrived, they boiled sap over an open fire to make syrup."

In these early years, it was maple sugar (rather than maple syrup) that was the most popular and widely known maple product. "We know that tapping maple trees was an important way of life for the Native Americans. When the white settlers came, they learned from the Native Americans and they too incorporated it into their lives," explained Kim Kelderhouse, Executive Director of the Leelanau Historical Society. "To this day, collecting maple sap is an important part of Leelanau County's people's lives."

Our next-door neighbor, Bill Sterett, a retired DNR forester, has tapped Maple trees, turning it into maple syrup, for much of his life. Bill uses the traditional method to process his sap into maple syrup. "Maple sugaring time typically starts in late February to early March here in Leelanau County," he explained. "With the season's accompanying freezing nights and warmer days, this causes the sap to move upward and then this process reverses itself at night flowing downward into the branches of the trees."

"There are multiple ways to tap the trees, but the basic process is the same," said Bill. "When sap is flowing freely, a small hole is drilled into the tree about



two inches deep, next a spile (or spike), a hollow tube, is fit snugly into the hole. It can be made of metal or plastic and provides the place to place a bucket or bag or a connection for plastic tubing."

The hung spile directs the sap towards the hanging bucket that is hung on a hook fitted onto the spile. It may sound strange, but this hook is important; "If you pound the spile into the hole before fitting the metal hook over the end of the spile, there is no way to hang the bucket," said Bill.

Next, he hangs a large pail underneath the spike directing drips into a waiting container. The Native Americans called these containers *mokuks* which they constructed out of birch bark. It's fun to watch the sap's progress as it fills the buckets, some days giving an abundance of the sap, while other days it is much slower.

When the buckets are full Bill then carries and transfers each of them into a large container sitting by the side of the wood burning cooking stove he has set up in his backyard. "It probably takes, in the average boil that I do with about 80 gallons of sap, up to two days to get the syrup to the right consistency," he expounded. "I use a special instrument to measure the concentration of sugar to sap. When I am boiling and it tells me I just about have syrup I transfer it to a kettle and let that settle for a couple of days. Then I bring the kettle into the house where I filter the syrup and then bottle it. The bottling process is quite simple. As long as your bottles are clean, and you use new caps, and you are bottling hot

syrup you should not worry about the syrup going bad." It is interesting to note it takes around 40 gallons of sap to boil down into one gallon of syrup!

The Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians (GTB) Natural Resource Department manages a community sugar bush on Putman Rd in Peshawbestown. For the last seven years GTB has hosted a community sugar bush to celebrate this important tradition.

"We are celebrating a tradition that started with indigenous groups in the American Northeast and Great Lakes that included the Anishinaabe," said William Derouin, Agricultural Manager at GTB. This program has grown to include the GTB Sugarbush camp, which will be held on March 13-14 and March 20-21.

The process requires patience, skill, and a knowledge of nature's rhythms. For generations, families and small producers have carried on this tradition, gathering sap in the crisp spring air and boiling it down to perfection. More than just a seasonal task, maple syrup production is a labor of love that connects communities to the land and each other.

"I look forward every year to this season, when the sap starts to flow not only in the trees, but it seems to flow in my blood and gets it moving after the long winter cooped indoors," said Bill.

Yes, tapping maple trees is worth it for the experience but do prepare for a lot of hard work. Knowing the finished product came from your own back yard can be a happy, and ever so delicious, end reward.

For more information and a list of events, visit: GTBIndians.org/events.asp

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