

The Gravel Laker

Volume XXXV Number 1

gravellake.org

Spring/Summer, 2025

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Photo by Janice Pinkos

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Barletta

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President's Corner

What's on my mind these days? Well, a lot! One topic I'd like to elaborate on is trees. With the frequency of storm damage and the amount of development we're experiencing, I wanted to give you some information and considerations.

Trees are very important for inland lakes and provide many benefits.

- Water quality—trees filter and slow down nutrient-laden runoff before it gets to the lake
- Shoreline protection—near-shore trees help stabilize shorelines
- Habitat and appeal—trees provide habitat for many important species and improve the aesthetic of the lake
- Water temperature—tree shade reduces water temperature which is more aquatic animal-friendly and is less hospitable to algae
- Air quality—trees remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and release oxygen
- Energy efficiency—shade cover reduces home cooling costs in the summer



Photo: Melissa DeSimone

What trees are good for property around Gravel Lake?

- | | |
|--|---|
| • Swamp white oak (near shore, wet soil friendly) | • Red & silver maple (great fall color) |
| • Black willow (near shore, wet solid friendly) | • Tamarack (native evergreen) |
| • Burr oak (tolerant of wet, dry, and average soils) | • Bog & yellow birch (butterfly friendly) |

For detailed information, check out Wildtype Nursery:

<https://www.wildtypeplants.com>

https://www.wildtypeplants.com/_files/ugd/8a6639_86633e1b99d2487f9b73239046e8f694.pdf

We are still pursuing a tree grant program for interested Gravel Lake homeowners via the Van Buren Conservation District. Details are TBD, but funding appears to be available. Missy and I are planning to plant two to three new trees as well as shrubs with our new project. Personally, we like swamp white oak and burr oak for our space.

Love your lake and consider planting some trees!

Craig

Sources:

<https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/the-long-lived-benefits-of-trees>

https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/smart_trees_and_shrubs_for_natural_shoreline_plantings

(Note: For clickable links, view this newsletter at www.gravellake.org.)



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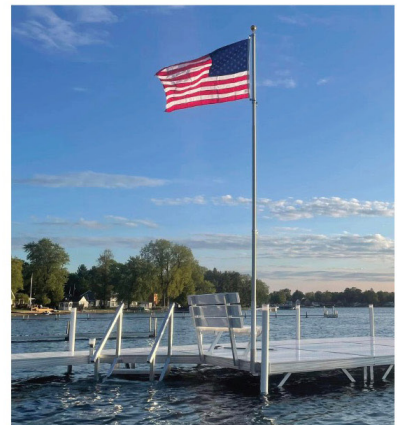
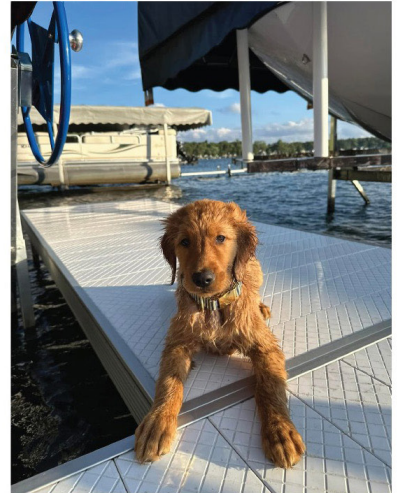


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2025 Calendar Of Events

Date

Sunday, May 11
 Saturday, May 17
 Monday, May 26
 Saturday, June 7
 Sunday, June 15
 Friday, July 4

 Saturday, July 5

 Saturday, July 12
 Saturday, July 19
 Saturday, August 9
 Saturday, August 16
 Monday, September 1
 Saturday, September 20
 Saturday, October 4
 Monday, October 13
 Saturday, October 18

Event

Mother's Day
 BOT meeting
 Memorial Day
 Membership Meeting and Picnic
 Father's Day
 Fourth of July , GL Fourth activities:
 Fun Run, Paddle Boat Regatta
 GL Fourth activities: Kids games,
 Boat parade
 BOT meeting
 Garage Sale Day
 Poker Run
 Membership meeting
 Labor Day
 BOT meeting
 Fall Festival
 Indigenous Peoples Day, Columbus Day
 BOT meeting



Photo: Maria Lowe

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Gravel Lake Association 2025 Calendar

BOARD/MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS

Saturday, June 7, 10am—Membership Meeting & Picnic

-Location: Zwartz's backlot on Idle Ease

Saturday, July 12, 10am—Board of Trustees Meeting

-Location: Porter Township Hall

Saturday, August 16, 10am—Membership Meeting

-Location: Rinaldi's pole barn on Gebhard

Saturday, September 20, 10am—Board of Trustees Meeting

-Location: Porter Township Hall

Saturday, October 18, 10am—Board of Trustees Meeting

-Location: Porter Township Hall

FOURTH OF JULY ACTIVITIES

Information regarding Fourth of July activities will be posted on the Gravel Lake Community Facebook page. If you'd like to volunteer, please contact Jen Micheli (jmicheli7@hotmail.com).

Fun Run 5K—Friday, July 4 at 9am

Start near old Willow Beach Grocery

Paddle Boat Regatta—Friday, July 4 at 6pm

Start at the mouth of the channel

Kids Games—Saturday, July 5 at 10am

Willow Beach Grocery front (lakeside) lawn

Boat Parade—Saturday, July 5 at sunset

(immediately following Taps)

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Gravel Lake Garage Sale & Market Day—Saturday, July 19

Need to do some spring cleaning? Clean out the clutter and turn your unused items into cash. We will be collecting names and locations in June to place on the map. Last year our sales earned enough to send a check to a local charity. If you would like to participate, register with Linda Vitkauskas by phone (269-303-7787) or email (vitkauskas3@comcast.net). Be sure to register by July 1 to be included in the advertising and on the map.

On July 19 place your items in your garage or yard roadside and wait for the shoppers. Ads will be placed in all area event publications. Participating locations will be listed on a Gravel Lake map and distributed to shoppers.



Photo: Amy Karl Swalec

Gravel Lake Association 2025 Calendar (continued)

Poker Run

The Poker Run is tentatively scheduled for Saturday, August 9. We are in need of docks and volunteers. Check the Gravel Lake Community Facebook page and website for more information. Email Alyssa Pinkos (alyssa.pinkos@gmail.com) if you are interested in volunteering or hosting a dock.

Gravel Lake Apparel Sales

Saturday, June 7, 10-12pm @ GLA Picnic

Saturday, July 5, 10-12pm during the Fun Run @ Pinkos house (Idle Ease Beach)

Saturday, August 9 during Poker Run sales @ Pinkos house

For additional sales dates, keep an eye on the Gravel Lake Community Facebook page and website. Check, cash, and Venmo are accepted forms of payment.



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Photo: Perri Gordon



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Keeping the Night Sky Dark

There's nothing quite like a clear southwest Michigan night—it seems impossible how many galaxies and stars can be visible to the naked eye. On busy lake weekends, however, it can be a little more challenging to enjoy all the beauty the sky has to offer.

Light pollution might sound like a highbrow city problem, but it's something from which any neighborhood can suffer. Don't get me wrong, we all appreciate a well-lit path and a bit of nighttime security. But when your neighbor's backyard looks like a minor league baseball stadium, it's tough to enjoy the subtle beauty of the night sky—or sleep with your curtains open.

The truth is, excessive outdoor lighting doesn't just obscure the stars; it can also disrupt local wildlife sleep and migratory patterns, interfere with natural sleep rhythms (yours and the raccoons'), and cause some neighborly grumbling. The good news? Thoughtful lighting doesn't mean going dark; it means pointing lights down, shielding them properly, and using only as much as you need. Think ambiance, not interrogation. Also, turning out those lights can save on the electric bill. According to the Dark Sky Association, 30% of outdoor light goes to waste, shining where it is not necessary or used, and this can really add up over the course of a year on wasted energy expenditures.

So let's all take a moment to look up and consider dialing back the brightness. Try fully shielded fixtures that focus light downward, installing motion sensors, or trying warmer color temperatures in your bulbs to help out. We'll all win with less light pollution—smaller bills, happier animals and neighbors, and better views!

Tricia Brucks



Photo: Jay Emcee

Where Do My Gravel Lake Association Dues Go?

- Water quality testing and research
- Social activities: picnic, Fourth of July, Fall Festival, etc.
- Communications: *The Gravel Laker*, website hosting, signage, other printed information, etc.
- No Wake Zone buoys (weed bed, channel)
- New resident welcome baskets
- *The Michigan Riparian* subscriptions
- Michigan Lakes & Streams association dues
- Membership directories
- Treasurer's bonding
- Liability insurance
- Administrative costs (invoices, postage, office supplies, etc.)

PAY DUES ONLINE AT



Why Should I Become a member?

- Increase lake stewardship and water quality
- Support the efforts and activities of the Gravel Lake Association
- Voice your opinion
- Strengthen our community
- Meet your neighbors
- Protect your significant real estate investment

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Photo: Perri Gordon

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Beautify a Corner of Your Shoreline

Join your neighbors around the lake in planting a small grouping of native plants along a corner of your shoreline.

The association will be selling a small bundle of native plants (at cost) to plant along a small portion of your shoreline. The idea of a corner native plant shoreline sprouted from me seeing my mother's neighbors, Kathy and Marty Heneghan. They planted a small garden along a corner of their shoreline to provide stability of an area that muskrats had burrowed. A local nursery recommended native plants because they have long roots that support the integrity of the shoreline. The blooms were beautiful. They had three different types of plants; as one completed its bloom cycle, the next one would begin. I thought it was so pretty and such a good idea.

When speaking to Kathy about her garden, she said the planting worked to stabilize the shoreline and discouraged the muskrats burrowing. She shared how she loved the garden and enjoyed seeing butterflies, big bumble bees, and hummingbirds visiting the plants. She said, "The garden is so pretty. It's an attractive landscape that is beautiful and enhances the beauty of the shoreline."

Participating members will receive a bundle of 12 plants. Each bundle includes:

- 4 Southern Blue Flag (iris, purple, spring bloomer)
- 4 Brown Eyed Susans (yellow, early summer bloomer)
- 4 Swamp Milkweed (pink, summer bloomer)

The cost is \$25 per bundle.

These plants are specifically chosen because they require wet land and need to have wet roots. The nursery is providing these plants to us at wholesale pricing. We will only have a very limited amount available; this year we have plants for 24 families. I plan to have the plants available in August. If you are interested in reserving your bundle, please text Heidi Kussurelis at 734-395-6008. Please provide your name, beach, and address.

What are the benefits of participating?

1. Helps filter run-off water that enters Gravel Lake, providing us cleaner water
2. Helps prevent erosion
3. Helps reduce wave bounce back
4. Attracts butterflies, birds, and bumble bees
5. Provides joy by beautifying Gravel Lake

Heidi Kussurelis

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Meet the McDevitts

Where are you from and what do you do?

My family and I lived in Illinois throughout my police career, and we now live in northwest Indiana.

Tell us about your family.

My wife Marilyn and I have two children and five grandchildren. Our daughter Erika, her husband Jason, and their three children (Kylie, Livi, and Tanner) live in St. John, IN. Our son Chris, his wife Kelly, and their two boys (Liam and Cam) live outside of Fairbanks, Alaska.

Describe your home and its location on the lake.

We live on Huff's Landing, right next to the Public Launch.

What is something unique or interesting about your home.

Living on Gravel Lake Drive as one of only 11 houses, there is no traffic, which was especially good when the grandkids were little. Of course, we're responsible for maintaining Gravel Lake Drive (it is actually a driveway, not a road) but everyone chips in. Thankfully we've got Greg Brucks, who is a great guy, as our neighbor, and he puts in the work to keep it in great condition.

What year was your home built, and have you made any improvements?

The house was built in the 60s and we've done quite a bit of work to it. We added two bedrooms and another bathroom, and we extended the living room. Now we have five bedrooms and two bathrooms. We also built a pole barn. Every time my wife and daughter start talking about doing something to the house, I know it will involve an addition of some kind. Our property covers 2.5 acres with lots of parking and we are very comfortable.



Meet a Gravel Laker (continued)

When and why did you first come to Gravel Lake?

I had a cop buddy who owned two houses—one on Gravel and the other on Bair Lake. He wanted to sell the one on Gravel and my wife and I went up to see it. As we finished the walk-through, she looked at me and said “You do know that we’re going to buy this place, right?” Of course I agreed, and as we walked out, I saw our new next-door neighbors, George and Louise Ehemann, getting into their car. We went over to introduce ourselves. After meeting these very nice people, we were convinced this was the place for us.

When we met George, he asked me what I did for a living. I told him I was a cop, just like the guy from whom we were buying the house. George looked at me and said, “Good, I like cops.” That was all it took, and I knew I was going to like this guy.

What is your favorite memory at the lake?

We bought our place to make family memories, and we have been blessed to do just that. Our grandkids are now 21, 20, 18, 14, and 12, and they’ve grown up here. We are truly fortunate to be Gravel Lakers, as we have great neighbors and many wonderful friends. Every year we have a big Fourth of July family celebration, and we’ve had as many as 30 people at our place. In years past, before expanding the house, our yard looked like a campground with all the tents, and until we expanded the house, we had to rent a Port-a-Pottie.



Meet a Gravel Laker (continued)

We've got a nice fire pit down by the water, and have had many terrific family campfires over the years, complete with lots of s'mores.

What is your favorite lake activity?

I like cruising around in our pontoon boat, which is named "The Side Job" because of all the side jobs I had as a cop. My grandkids call me "Ampa" and they joke that I'm doing about "one Ampa per hour". The only time our boat gets up to full speed is when our son comes down from Alaska—he's a lot more aggressive than I am, and he has the "need for speed" that I don't.

We also love walking around the lake, meeting new people, and seeing old friends. The town of Lawton is great, and our favorite family restaurant is Big T.

Do you have a favorite lake animal?

Turtles, geese, ducks, and almost anything but muskrats—they got into our engine area twice and chewed up the wiring. Fortunately, Apollo Marine came to the rescue. Big thanks to Jim and Kyle Rau; they got it all fixed up.

What is your favorite lake holiday?

Fourth of July—the activities that the Gravel Lake Association sponsors are outstanding. We especially like the Fun Run/Walk and the Boat Parade.

A number of years ago, my wife, daughter, and I attended a Gravel Lake Association meeting. Craig DeSimone, our President, announced that there was an opening for a trustee on Huff's Landing. I heard a very familiar voice behind me say, "I nominate Dan McDevitt," and I thought, "Gee, that sounds just like my wife." Craig figured it out too, laughed, and closed the nominations, and thus I've been a trustee for many years. I really enjoy serving in that role.



Meet a Gravel Laker (continued)

What is your favorite thing to do away from the lake?

My favorite thing is spending time with the family. I've taught all over the world for the State Department and the Defense Department. I also travelled extensively during my 20-year military career, and although I love to travel, my favorite destination is Gravel Lake.

Why is Gravel Lake special to you?

Being from a large family (I am the eldest of ten) we never had anything like our own lake house. As I look back on the great lives that my family and I have had, the time we've spent at Gravel Lake has truly been a very special part of all that. The memories we've made here will last the rest of our lives.



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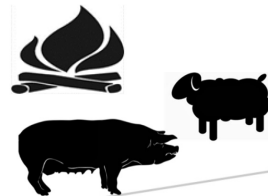
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Beneath the Surface: An Essay About Gravel Lake

My memories of Gravel Lake always start the same way, with the sound of waves crashing and feet thudding on soft grass. There are always boats on the water and the sun in the sky in my mind. One distinct memory that comes to mind when I think of my lakehouse is when I was five. Everything at the lake, like the fish, the boats, and the water, felt bigger than life.

I had always wanted to get out on the water and ski or wakeboard like the adults. It was a clear July morning when my grandpa patted me on the back and said, "Today's the day you learn to water ski!" He treated it like an honor, almost like a ritual every young boy must go through to be crowned a member of Gravel Lake. I got super excited because I had always asked and wanted to learn. Honestly, I was terrified. I had seen how fast skiers got towed, and the thought of falling into the water at high speeds scared me. The skis looked like giant popsicle sticks glued together, and I was amazed anyone could manage to stand on water like this. My family wished me luck, and I got ready to go by putting my lifejacket on and strapping into the skis.



"Just keep your arms straight and let the boat do all the work," my dad said. "You'll be surprised how easy it is to stay up once you're out of the water." I nodded like I understood what he was saying. My heart thumped like a drum in my chest. My grandpa decided to take the pontoon boat out instead of the speedboat to ensure a calmer start for me. The engine roared to life, spitting out water behind it. I gripped the handle of the rope until my hands turned pale. The line straightened out, and I felt the boat slowly start to tug me forward. I yelled "Hit it!" and suddenly I was flying forward. My knees were bent, my arms were shaking, and my skis were slapping across the surface of the water. I remember thinking to myself, "I'm doing this! I'm really skiing right now!" It was a dream come true. Then I wiped out. Hard.

The skis went one way, and my arms went another. I swallowed what felt like half the lake. When I popped up out of the water, I expected disappointment. But the boat had circled back, and everyone was laughing, not at me, but with me. My grandpa gave me a big thumbs up from the back of the boat. At five years old, that was enough for me. I had accomplished a feat that was in my wishes for as long as I could remember.

Beneath the Surface: An Essay About Gravel Lake

Another fond memory I have is of the first fish I ever caught. I was four years old, and my family had taken our pontoon boat across the lake to my grandparents' house for a visit. It was in the summer, and better weather could not have been achieved. My grandfather let me try his old fishing pole to keep me occupied. The pole had a worn-out and taped-up handle and smelled like cedar and motor oil. He stood next to me, arms crossed, with a bucket hat on top of his head.

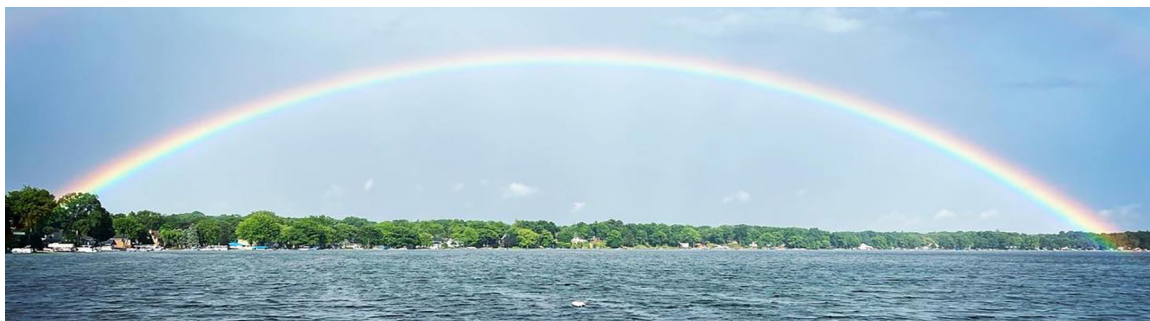
"You'll feel the fish pull before you see it," he said, pointing at the bobber. We didn't talk much after that. We just stood in silence, watching the water ripple and listening to the rustle of wind through the trees. Then, when all hope seemed lost, I suddenly felt a tug so strong it yanked my arms forward.

"Set the hook!" my grandfather shouted.

I pulled back with all of my weight, and the pole bent like a bow. Whatever was on the other end fought like it had no plans of giving up. My heart started racing, not out of fear, but out of excitement. After what felt like forever, I reeled in a giant, slick bass shining in the sun. I turned around with the behemoth on my hook, and my family cheered for me. I took a picture with the fish, but I didn't need one. That moment was carved into my memory like a painting into an ancient cave. As the sun dipped below the trees that night, everything felt still. There was still a calmness that wrapped around the lake like a blanket. I sat on the swing in my backyard, taking in the lake for everything it was worth. Behind me, the adults laughed and grilled burgers, and fireflies had started to blink out over the lawn.

At Gravel Lake, time moves differently. It stretches and folds around moments like these. My first time skiing, the first fish I ever caught, and many others are all held together by my favorite place on Earth. I wasn't just learning to ski or fish. I was learning how to try, how to fail, how to stand back up, and how to be patient when it mattered. Somewhere between catching that fish, getting up on those skis, and the silence that fell over the lake every night, I was becoming a different person. The lake made me braver, steadier, and a little more sure of who I was. For all these reasons, I will be forever in debt to the place that raised me.

Trey Stade
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Photo: Mary Rinaldi



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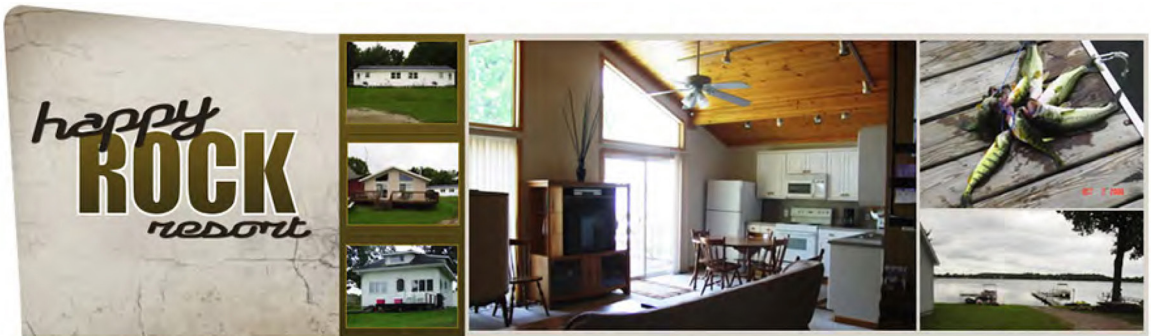




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A Request from the Gravel Lake History Committee

Are you going through old pictures of the lake? Have you uncovered any photos, film, or slides from when your family first came to Gravel Lake? The History Committee wants to gather pictures and stories from our families at the lake. We will be handing out more "story starters" at our annual picnic in June. We encourage you to unearth and share some Gravel Lake memories the next time you are cleaning out forgotten spaces in your home at the lake.

The History Committee is aiming to put together a book to preserve the history of Gravel Lake. Cedar Lake produced one and it was a beautiful way to preserve the history of their lake and community. When you find some relics from the past, please set them aside and share them with us! We will gladly take anything you have, and we will return them to you promptly.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions or comments, or any historical artifacts to share, please email Sherri Kurtyak at skurtyak@gmail.com.



Photo of Huff's Landing from the collection of Mary and Paul Howell

From left to right: Jane, Ann, Mary, Sara, and Martin Bukacek. Probably taken by Paula Bukacek (Mary Howell's mother). The white cottage was owned by Frenchie Willet, now Greg and Tricia Brucks. The other cottage was owned by the Hagels.

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 o g i l j o l n r z f p i s b p t d e s s
 h u j j d j n a m m u b n f h o u c e k t
 t a b t x b q b n w l n g f m p b g z r y
 r b o a t p a r a d e c q u e s d o q d h
 u h p d e b d e e w i q g h t i l y n t h
 o h a m b u r g e r w n e m i c v a m p c
 f v z s r e l k r a p s g a h l s s x l h
 c e l e b r a t e j l f q t w e q d x v l

June
 July
 August

Fun Run
 Kids Games
 Boat Parade

Gravel Lake
 Chamberlin
 Dugan's Landing
 Gebhard
 Huff's Landing
 Idle Ease
 Lewis

Sandy
 Streeter
 Willow
 Winkler
 Channel
 weed bed
 celebrate

Fourth of
 July
 popsicle
 hamburger
 hot dog
 sparklers
 stars

stripes
 bang
 boom
 fireworks
 red
 white
 blue
 celebrate (2)
 music



Terrill's Market

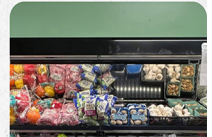
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Terrill's Market is a 108 year-old meat market and grocery store; Blake, the fifth generation owner and head meat cutter, keeps tradition alive by hand cutting, trimming, grinding, stuffing, seasoning, and marinating everything we sell in our meat case - all USDA Choice and ABOVE.

We offer a huge selection of steaks, chops, brats (46 unique flavors), chicken, sausage, deli meats and cheeses as well as a large selection of produce (including locally grown/organic). Stop in soon and find out why we've been trusted by Marcellus and surrounding communities for 108 years and counting. You won't be disappointed.

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Newsletter Staff

Jamie Paramski, Editor
jparamski@gmail.com

Jim McGreal, Design
jim@jmcstudios.com

Spencer McGreal, Production/Graphics
spencer@jmcstudios.com

Lois Gorbacz, Ads
gorbfam996@gmail.com

Contributors: Tricia Brucks

Cover Photo: Janice Pinkos

Printing: Printing by Joe
printingbyjoe@sbcglobal.net



Su: 11am-6pm
M: Closed
T/W: 11am-9pm
Th: 11am-10pm
F/S: 11am-11pm

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GRAVEL LAKE ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP FORM:

January 2025 – December 2025

Fill out and mail to: **Gravel Lake Association, P.O. Box 531, Lawton, MI 49065**

You can also pay dues online at gravellake.org

Please print clearly.

Member name(s): _____

Beach: _____ Lake Phone: _____

Gravel Lake address: _____ Lawton, MI 49065

Home mailing address: _____

Home phone: _____ City: _____ State: ____ Zip: _____

E-mail address: _____

Please print clearly. Mail check or money order payable to Gravel Lake Association

Membership dues for **2025** **\$50.00**

I would like to receive 4 free issues of the Riparian magazine for **2026**.

Yes No (circle one)

Please indicate where your Riparian should be sent.

Home Lake (circle one)

Additional donation _____

Total Enclosed _____

Where Do My Gravel Lake Association Dues Go?

- Water quality testing and research
- Social activities: picnic, Fourth of July, Fall Festival, etc.
- Communications: *The Gravel Laker*, website hosting, signage, other printed information, etc.
- No Wake Zone buoys (weed bed, channel)
- New resident welcome baskets
- *The Michigan Riparian* subscriptions
- Michigan Lakes & Streams association dues
- Membership directories
- Treasurer's bonding
- Liability insurance
- Administrative costs (invoices, postage, office supplies, etc.)

Why Should I Become a member?

- Increase lake stewardship and water quality
- Support the efforts and activities of the Gravel Lake Association
- Voice your opinion
- Strengthen our community
- Meet your neighbors
- Protect your significant real estate investment

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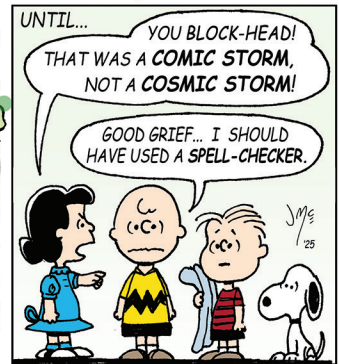
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Appologies to Stan, Jack and Charles



Join the Gravel Lake Association Community Facebook group!

The Gravel Lake Association Community Facebook page is an excellent way to connect with our fellow lakers. Important lake-related information is posted there frequently, including weed treatment dates, when the newsletter is available, event info, lost-and-found info, announcements, recommendations, and surveys where you can voice your opinion. People also post pictures from around the lake, even in the winter!

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OTHER CONTRIBUTORS

Editor, Gravel Laker	Jamie Paramski - jparamski@gmail.com
Newsletter Advertising	Lois Gorbacz- gorbfam996@gmail.com
Fundraising	Alyssa Pinkos (chair)
Communications	Jim McGreal - jim@jmcstudios.com
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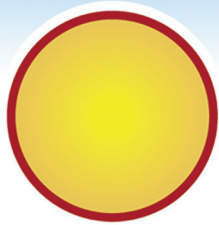
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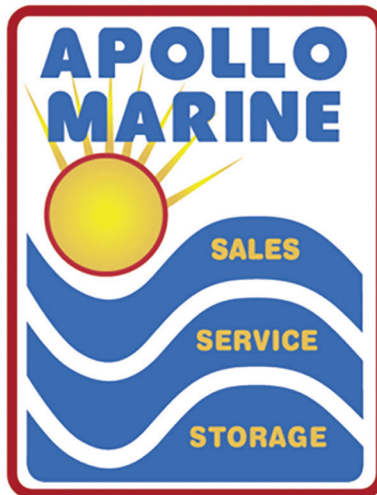
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