

Borealis

The Monthly Journal of Northern Michigan Mensa



Volume 4 Number 2

November 2005

 **Borealis**
Northern Michigan Mensa

www.nmm.us.mensa.org

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American Mensa LTD.
1229 Corporate Drive West
Arlington, TX 76006-6103

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Borealis is published by Northern Michigan Mensa (3/496) once each month under the auspices of its Executive Committee.

After mandatory items, priority in the newsletter is given to matters appealing to members of the group which relate to their membership in Mensa. The content of the newsletter shall appeal to the general membership of Northern Michigan Mensa.

The newsletter shall not include matters which are indecent, scandalous, libelous, or invade someone's privacy, nor shall copyrighted material be used without the permission of the owner. Ethnic, racist, sexist, or religious slurs shall not be printed. Northern Michigan Mensa recognizes that the newsletter is addressed to both minors and adults; material printed will be appropriate for distribution to minors.

All matters submitted to the editor shall be subject to editing for content, style, and space limitations, except when a person submits material with a restriction that it be published "as is or not at all". In such cases, it will include an editor's note stating it as such.

That a person has written and submitted something to the newsletter is not, in itself, sufficient reason for its publication. It is the editor's discretion whether to publish any submission, with the exception of mandatory items.

All submissions are welcome and encouraged. They may be sent via email or snail mail. They may be sent as attachments or in the body of the email.

Submissions requiring major editing are also welcome. If requested, the author may approve the editing before the article is published.

Photographs are also welcome. Please include a brief description of the photo, and the name of the photographer. You may also include an entire article to accompany the photo.

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VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT www.nmm.us.mensa.org

ON THE COVER: Stevens Lake by his house, from Jack Schultz

Northern Michigan Mensa

MOVIE CLUB – Saturday, 5 November 2005 at 2:00 p.m. We will meet at Flap Jack Shack located at 3980 N. US 31 S for the discussion portion of our meeting. Attend the movie that is showing in The Art House which is located in the Horizon Cinemas, 3587 Market Place Circle, Traverse City. Because the theater has changed owners and has changed movie times, we have a new format for when we view the show. Attend the movie that is playing beginning Friday, 28 October and running through Thursday 3 November (Movies change following the last showing on Thursday night, so don't wait until Friday the 4th as it may not be the same movie that we will be discussing.) If you are uncertain about which movie to attend, you can check the NMM Events webpage on Friday, 28th October for the title at <http://nmm.us.mensa.org/>

BRUNCH – Saturday, 12 November, 2005, at 11:00 a.m. We will meet at Cottage Café, located at 420 Munson Avenue, Traverse City. We will hold our gathering in the Papa's Den which is on the right as you enter the front door.

CELTIC MUSIC NIGHT FEATURING OUR OWN JUDITH LINDENAU AND DINNER– Monday, 14 November at 6:00 p.m. at the Loading Dock, 205 Lake Street near Cass, Traverse City. We will meet in time to get a table and order dinner, there is NO cover charge. They serve burgers, sandwiches, wraps, and salads. Music begins at 7:00 p.m. Judith is a well-known musician who plays the hammered dulcimer, hurdy gurdy, and pennywhistle. It will be a real treat to see her performing, and don't forget to bring your dancing shoes!

TGIF – Friday, 25 November 2005, at 6:00 p.m. We will meet in the Horizon Shine Café, located in the lower level of Horizon Books, 243 E. Front Street, Traverse City. Coffee, soft drinks, sandwiches, wraps, and desserts are available for purchase.

From the Editor

In the last issue, I informed you that I would no longer print controversial articles, such as those dealing with politics or religion. This was due to a complaint on the Stabenow article. I was advised this would probably be the best course, since one complaint often reflects the feelings of others who don't vocalize their complaints.

There has since been much discussion among the ExComm, and responses from a few of our members. Those responses can be found under "Letters to the Editor" further on in this issue.

I have now been given permission to decide how I would like to handle this issue. My decision is this: I will give the members until I publish the next issue to write to me with their opinions on this matter. I would like to hear any opinion - pro, con or neutral. I will abide by the majority rule on this.

While I can't please everyone, I will try to please the majority. I strongly encourage you to let your opinion be known. Just like an election, if you don't put in your vote, you have no right to complain about the outcome (oops, did I just slip in a political reference?).

I usually begin compiling submissions and building the newsletter shortly after the middle of the month. Get me your letters and emails ASAP. Please let me know whether you wish for me to print your response. If I am not informed otherwise, I will assume I have permission. I will let you know in the December issue what the policy will be in regard to types of material to be printed.

Send your emails to nmmnewsletter@hotmail.com.

Send snail mail to:

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Have a wonderful Thanksgiving, everyone!

AI-literations: Notes From Your RVC

By Alan Baltis, Regional Vice-Chairbeast for the Great Lakes/Ohio Valley Region 3

I often talk about how Mensa is a microcosm of the real world. That is, that a lot of the same joys and difficulties and philosophies and sophistries of the regular world appear within our own little group. This month I'd like to touch on chaos vs. order; that the former doesn't automatically mean anarchy, and that the latter doesn't automatically mean safety. That instead we should learn from successful organizations/countries/worlds, and find the right mix of the two to gain the benefits of both. Mensa is a *smart* group, and I so much want us to act like it; to strive for a balance between stability and creativity without devolving into either stagnation or entropy.

One of the Big Ideas of the last 10 years is that of Emergent Order. This messy, complex world of ours does indeed have a lot of things that seem to happen randomly, unrelatedly, "out of control." But there are also many examples of how systems of independent agents, each operating according to their own and often conflicting self-interest, develop into amazing complex adaptive systems that demonstrate most of the characteristics of what we usually classify as "orderly."

They are aware of, and respond "intelligently" to, their environment. They seem to seek a steady-state, an equilibrium that uses the systems' resources efficiently and "smartly." They respond quickly and efficiently to change, so much so that it appears almost prescient- that they "thought ahead" and were prepared for any eventuality. They seem to seek to continue their existence, exhibiting some aspects of self-preservation. And they even seem to reproduce, either splitting into or spawning systems with like characteristics. Pretty life-like, even a bit spooky.

Ant hills do it. Flocks of birds do it. Stock markets do it. Cities do it. The earth does it.

What's fascinating is that, for all of these characteristics of "intelligent life," the system is not alive as we know it. The observer, based on the system's behavior, infers the "intelligence" of the system.

But there truly is no mind behind these behaviors, no guiding force, no sentience. Nothing is making choices, the system wasn't actively designed to act smartly; no one is in charge. The system just... is.

On the other hand, there are many things of great complexity and order that seemingly could never emerge without there being some thought and direction and will behind them. Most of our modern technology did not spontaneously emerge- it took big brains and sharp thoughts and multiple attempts to make a microwave or a computer or a car or a vaccine. So it seems that we need both heavily ordered and heavily free environments, with circumstances determining what the right approach to take is, or even what the goal of such a system should be.

Okay, okay- enough with the Big Thoughts, AI. How does any of that matter to me, the standard (though hardly common) Mensa member?

For a few years now Mensa has been going through discussions as to just how centralized or localized we should be, just what the role of local groups and SIGs and the AMC and the National office should be. And this often has seemed to be a polarizing issue- people rush to either end of that spectrum, whether you call it chaos vs. order, or control vs. freedom, or small vs. large. And I think what I want to convey is that most true but perhaps least satisfying of answers- "it depends."

I wrote this column to speak to the value of freedom, of not assuming that there's only one way (especially only one Right way) to do anything, and to be not just tolerant but actively embracing of the messy process of experimentation and serendipity. But I also acknowledge that there is a need for us to serve our members well, to spend their money wisely, to be efficient and effective in the day-to-day things that really are "solved problems."

We're often combating an organization-life-cycle mentality here, where the "mature" organization is seen as more standardized and efficient and "correct." But I think what a lot of large and long-lasting organizations are finding is that becoming perfectly efficient also often means becoming perfectly stuck in "the way we've always done things," and that in this ever-changing and ever-more-*rapidly* changing world of ours, that's a pretty clear formula for obsolescence, even death. I think we need to understand when to organize and when to leave well enough alone if we're going to maximize our success as an organization.

If you're interested in more about this topic, and you happen to get a newsletter this column appears in before November, you may want to come hear my talk at the HalloweeM RG in Chicago on the weekend before Halloween. If that doesn't work out, I would still be happy to send you the outline of my talk, and a bibliography of books on this topic. Just zip me an email at RVC3@us.mensa.org. And as always, if you have facts and opinions you'd like to share, please feel free to write me at that same address.

Have a great Thanksgiving!

Notice on Project Inkslinger

The October monthly package from the National Office includes a Project Inkslinger request and guidelines for book donations to replace books lost due to the recent hurricanes. Two places were listed. One is the Texas Library Association, www.tsla.org, in Austin TX. We have been asked to suspend shipment of books to the TXLA for the time being. They have already received over 60,000 lbs of books, and have no room left for others. In the coming months they will sort and distribute what they have, and will then inform us of libraries still in need in the TX, LA, MS, area. I will let you know of shipping addresses when they are available. They would still enjoy financial donation to help with their costs.

The other place listed is Reader to Reader Inc., www.readertoreader.org, in Amherst MA. I called there a few minutes ago. They have not been affected by the flooding in the Northeast, and will be happy to receive books from us. Please note their specific request for science/educational/history/poetry and similar books.

Thanksgiving Word Search

S	T	U	F	F	I	N	G	P	H
C	O	F	F	E	E	C	Q	N	G
H	U	H	D	A	E	R	B	O	M
E	T	A	A	Y	L	A	N	S	S
P	U	M	P	K	I	N	P	I	E
S	R	L	O	F	D	B	X	N	L
A	K	F	T	E	A	E	I	E	K
L	E	R	A	C	V	R	S	V	C
A	Y	C	T	C	O	R	N	X	I
D	G	G	O	B	W	Y	K	F	P

Words to find:

potato
salad
ham
cranberry
venison
stuffing
turkey

pickles
coffee
bread
corn
tea
& (a Thanksgiving favorite)
pumpkin pie

By Margaret Scott

NORMAL

By Ruth Minshull

Everyone seems normal until you get to know them.

This offering is from our old friend, that purveyor of wit, wisdom and truth, Ms. Anonymous.

The natural extrapolation here is that *no one* is normal. Well, that explains a lot, doesn't it?

I used to wonder how I had acquired so many weird friends. Did I do something to attract them? Everybody I know is wacky one way or another. But then, this quote cleared things up for me.

I thought of all the people I had admired in my life; some I had even placed on a pedestal. Eventually, as I got to know more about them, I found that they, too, had a bit of screwiness somewhere. This un-normalness might range from a little quirky to downright certifiable. It may be attractive and quite tolerable (*He's a little eccentric.*) or so looney that people start edging away when he gets near them.

If you look at all the conflicts in the world--between nations, groups, neighbors, family members, siblings, mates--they are always fueled by the conviction that the other party should be perfect, but isn't. Whew! No wonder most people have trouble finding Miss Right or Mr. Right. Instead of looking for the perfect mate, we should be seeking a ding-a-ling whose flaky ways are a complement to our own flaky ways. Then (like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle) we might get some kind of a fit. So, from all this, I guess we can conclude that nobody is perfect. In fact, nobody is even normal (whatever that is).

I once heard of a woman who had to look under her bed every night before she could go to sleep. What would she have done if a serial killer had leered up at her? Or a boa constrictor lay waiting to pounce? Anyway, I assume that she considered herself to be normal.

Then there was the man who (while a guest in someone's home) would change the bathroom toilet paper around, if it was not installed according to his preference. I don't know if he was an over-the-top kind of guy or a down-from-the-back type--but it had to be hanging *his* way before he would use the room. Maybe he thought he was normal. (Do you think?)

I am reminded of the old joke about the man who went to a psychiatrist. "My family made me come here," he said.

"And why was that?"

"Well, Doc, I like pancakes."

"Hmm," replied the psychiatrist. "Well, I like pancakes myself."

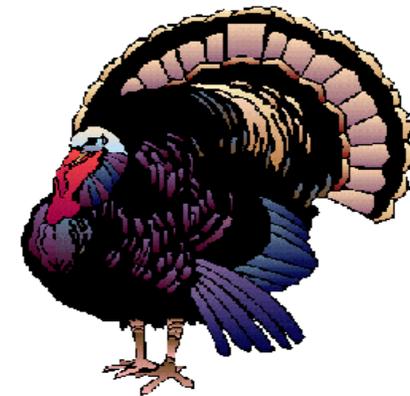
"Oh, really? Where do you keep yours? I keep mine in a suitcase."

The patient seemed to think it was perfectly normal to collect pancakes. His family, apparently, didn't. I presume the psychiatrist agreed with the family.

People are always blathering about how we should have World Peace. This idea itself is way off in the ozone. Most of us can't even agree with our spouses about what color to paint the kitchen. If we really want World Peace, all of us fusspots are going to have to quit finding fault with other people's battiness and accept one another as a different kind of "normal" from our own. Then maybe we could be a little more tolerant. At least, that would be a start.

I'll take the first step toward World Peace by recommending that we all agree on the best place to keep our pancakes.

Personally, I prefer plastic bags. They pack better.



Even at a Mensa convention, someone is the dumbest person in the room.

Ralph Hillquist

Letters to the Editor

In September, Borealis printed an article written by Melissa Rennie regarding US Senator Debbie Stabenow. Soon after that issue was released, in my capacity as Local Secretary, I received a complaint about it. Although no one has read the complaint or knows the identity of the person, I did raise the issue at a meeting of the ExComm as to whether or not political content is appropriate in Borealis. The ExComm did not come to any consensus regarding whether there should be an editorial policy and the issue was tabled. Since the ExComm meeting is an open meeting and because it was held just prior to TGIF, some regular members of NMM were in attendance and voiced their opinions, other members heard about the issue as they are active in other committees of NMM. This controversy has prompted my letter to the editor today.

Sherry McNamara

Freedom of Speech

The function of any local newsletter is to provide the monthly calendar of events, report local and national Mensa news, and work as a tool to "facilitate communication" between members. The "primary objective" is to "enhance" the value of being a Mensan. Once we limit our intellectual thought, which is the essence of what it takes to be a Mensan, once we muzzle speaking out on subjects that this intelligence has formulated, once we cap the overwhelming flow of creativity about a subject by prohibiting those words from flowing freely, then what we are "allowed" to display will be nothing of significance. This alone would result in an exchange of information similar to or less than, the average human.

While I am not saying that we don't at times just act average, it is that distinction between us and them that made me seek out a group with which I could relate more fully, a group which shared one important thing: intelligence. Since the "function" of the newsletter is to "facilitate communication" once one of the primary sources of information exchange - the newsletter - in this group has been censored, will this expand to our brunches as well? Will politics and religion become taboo subjects which the group must refrain from speaking?

This Mensan wants to adhere to the freedoms that we have known to be acceptable in this country, and that includes freedom of speech. If someone cares to debate that, bring it on. It would add to the experience I expected when I joined this group. It would presumably give a different perspective, it would be a challenge, it would be fun! Mensans are intelligent people, they are very unlikely to be swayed from their political position by one article dealing with politics. Neither would a Mensan without political persuasion be moved into a party because of this article. A Mensan would, without doubt, investigate, research, communicate, and ponder, at least in my opinion, before making any political decision.

What would become of NMM if such communication was censored? Will we then think that politics and religion are not enough, would we begin to censor topics regarding sexual persuasion? Drug abuse? The weather? While that may be extreme, it is possible that we will begin to censor any topic that makes another member uncomfortable. We are intelligent people, if we don't want to read or discuss something we have the opportunity to choose not to, unless and until, we decide to restrict that too! If we censor now, we will evolve into an amalgamation of opinion-less, spineless, boring, unidentifiable nothings. Of that there is no doubt, but is that what we really want?"

Sherry McNamara

Policy

I thought we had no policy, which leaves things pretty wide open, which to me seems more interesting than having no diversity or controversy as long as it is relevant and tasteful. My only objection to the Stabenow article was that it was too long and not very interesting. I had trouble finishing it, but at least I was given a choice.

Ellen Monahan

Politics

If controversial subjects (politics, religion) are to be banned from Borealis, it will be the membership's loss and a refutation of the value of intellectual inquiry. I am very concerned that the statement in Borealis' preamble, "all submissions are welcome and encouraged", is no longer valid if, in fact, some submissions about certain topics are neither welcomed nor encouraged.

The complaint submitted to you about the Stabenow piece reminded me of a quote: "life is politics". I was surprised to find, through a quick google search, many attributions of the sentiment expressed in that phrase to both Socrates and Aristotle. The joys of googling!

Your censor might be surprised to learn that even Thanksgiving is politics: "You have politics whenever a group of people, with competing interests and agendas, come together to exercise power or to share resources. Negotiating for the last drumstick at Thanksgiving is politics! Much of life is politics. When a politician...complains of others playing politics, what he is really saying is that he did not get what he wanted from the political contest." - Scott McGerik

Are articles about Thanksgiving prohibited in Borealis? A couple other googled quotations:

"Life is politics. Those who claim they aren't playing the game are simply playing it poorly." - Author unknown

"Life is politics. And it has nothing to do with holding or seeking elective office. Life is politics at its very root, literally, because the word is derived from the Greek word for citizenship. Since there can be no true citizenship in the absence of participation, politics means being a part of the world around you." - Carolyn Warner

Perhaps NMM is in need of an editorial board to clarify publication policies, to support the editor and to assure that no one individual or cabal is empowered to dictate what the rest of us are and are not permitted to read. I, for one, would like to see more opinion pieces about religion and politics.

John Porter

Banana Cranberry Bread

Ingredients:

2 1/2 cups white sugar
1 cup shortening
3 eggs
3 mashed bananas
1 cup cranberry sauce
1/2 cup milk
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
4 cups all-purpose flour
1 1/2 teaspoons baking soda
1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon ground nutmeg
1/2 cup chopped walnuts

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F (175 degrees C). Lightly grease two 9x5 inch loaf pans.
2. In a large bowl, cream together the sugar and shortening until light and fluffy. Beat in eggs, and mix in bananas, cranberry sauce, milk, and vanilla. In a separate bowl, mix together flour, baking soda, baking powder, cinnamon, and nutmeg. Gradually blend flour mixture into the banana mixture. Fold in walnuts. Pour into the prepared loaf pans.
3. Bake for 50 to 60 minutes in the preheated oven, or until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean. Cool in pan for 10 minutes, then turn out onto a wire rack, and cool completely.