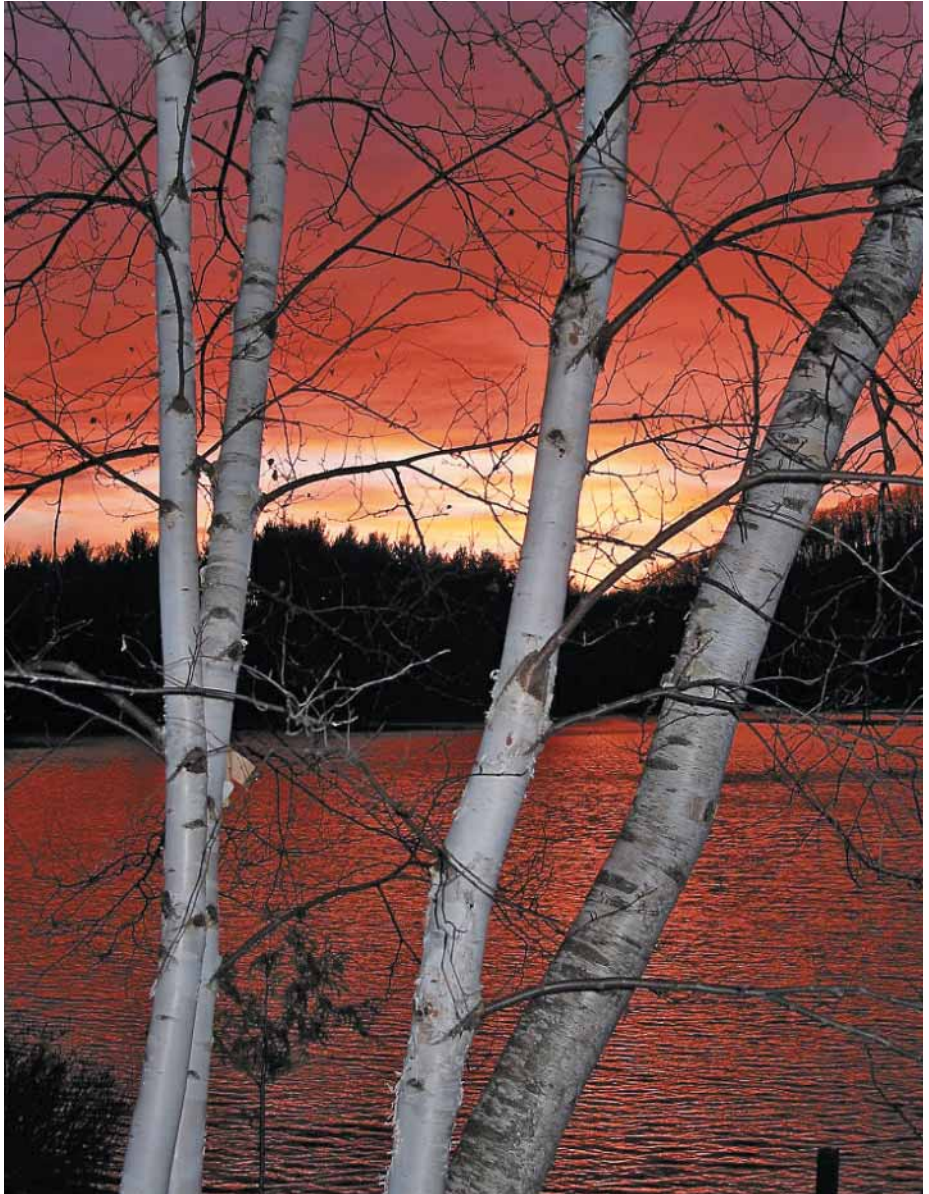




# Borealis

*The Monthly Journal of Northern Michigan Mensa*

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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. Bad jokes are allowed. 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 that if a person submits material with a restriction that it be published "as is or not at all." That a person has written and submitted something to the newsletter is not, in itself, sufficient reason for its publication.

**Submissions** are not only welcome, the editor will buy you a coffee at the next TGIF if you help him out.

Members of Northern Michigan Mensa may send their original writing submissions to *Borealis*.

*Please do not send the work of others unless such submissions are accompanied by written permission and release of copyright from the author.*

#### **Writing:**

1. Submit writing that can be edited for length and clarity, but not content. *This will be the default editorial assumption unless the author indicates otherwise.*

2. Writing may be submitted to be published only as it is. If writing is submitted "as is or not at all" it will not be edited in any way, and if published, will appear with an editor's note indicating it is wholly the work of the author.

3. Writing that is rough and needs major editing may also be submitted. If you have written something but don't have time to polish and edit it, you can still submit it and, at your request, I will give it extra help.

ALL. Writing and letters may be submitted by email as an attachment or as the message body itself. Typed pages and letters can be mailed.

#### **Photographs:**

Photographs and other scanned artwork can be submitted via email as JPEG or GIF files. Data should be at least 3x5 inches at 200 PPI. Digital camera files may be sent right from the camera; they will be processed for publication.

Flat art or photographs can also be mailed, but please do not send originals. Please label each piece submitted with your name and address.

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US mail: *Borealis*

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## Northern Michigan Mensa

# December 2003 Calendar

## Saturday, December 13

**ExComm Meeting - 10:00a.m.**

**Brunch - 11:00a.m.**

**Cottage Cafe, Traverse City**

The Cottage Cafe is at the Days Inn in Traverse City at 420 Munson (US-31 North). It's on the south side of the road between the Northwestern Michigan College entrance and 8th Street. All Members are welcome to the Executive Committee Meeting.

## Friday, December 19

**TGIF - Horizon Shine Café, Traverse City 6:00p.m.**

The Horizon Shine Cafe is located in the lower level of Horizon Books on Front Street in downtown Traverse City. Wrap sandwiches, salads, and beverages are available for purchase.

## Wednesday, December 31

**New Year's Eve Party - Social and Games Night!  
Stan and Dorothy Cain's Home, Acme. 8:00p.m.—1:00a.m.**

Stan and Dorothy will furnish soft drinks, beer, wine, champagne, and pizza. Please bring a snack to share and any games you might like to play. Please RSVP so our hosts know how many to expect - 938-1506.

**DIRECTIONS:** From Traverse City take US 31 north towards Acme. Turn right on Holiday Road and follow that past Holiday Hills Ski Resort. At Holiday Village Drive, turn right. At Lone Lookout Road, turn left. Follow Lone Lookout until the end and then turn left onto Village Circle Drive. Stan and Dorothy live on the right hand side of the road at 3584 Village Circle Drive.

## Perhaps Scrooge Was Right

I WAS AT THE 12-OAKS MALL IN NOVI on the day after Thanksgiving. It was not pretty. Under the auspices of Christmas Shopping people were jammed into the mall. They were not lovingly searching for a gift to show how much they care. They were struggling to meet an obligation. Spending for spending's sake.

It's all Dickens' Fault. Since *A Christmas Carol* western culture has labored under the notion that Christmas is a celebration best enjoyed by the acquisition of goods. We have been duped into thinking that we can make people happy by giving them things. This has created a huge market for "Gifts."

Americans have so much wealth that collectables are important gifts. Collectables are things that no one needs, that do absolutely nothing, and that have no value the day after the package is open. Millions of collectables will change hands this holiday season. Then there is the latest Electronic version of Elmo. The media try to create the "must have" gift each year. Do you remember the hype over the "Tickle Me" version of the furry monster? Where is the secondary market for those? If it was such a great toy, how come kids don't still want them? I have kids, so I know about this. Forget things with batteries; give them dolls and Lego so they can imagine and PLAY.

It seems reasonable that all kids should have new toys. But are we really helping children of underprivileged families by buying a toy? Does it do as much for the child whose life is in shambles as it does for the overspending donor quelling his or her guilt about spending so much money on nothing.

By giving the child a toy we are suggesting that if that child and his or her family had more money, and more stuff, they would be happier. Is that true? Most children who live in real poverty are there because their families are in complete dysfunction. I'm not talking about "lower income" families. You don't have to be rich to set a bit aside to buy a few Christmas toys. Does buying a toy do anything to improve the lives of those kids who live in such chaos that their parents can't scrape together \$5 for a toy truck or new doll? (My daughter's favorite doll cost \$1.79.) As a culture, we would help them more to teach those without wealth how to find the happiness already in their lives. Wouldn't we do more to allow those children to find some good in their lives than we would by giving them stuff.

Eighty years ago, even the wealthiest people didn't have Televisions, Game Boys and 5.0 hp Kitchen Aid mixers. Were they unhappy? Little girls made dolls from left over scraps of cloth. Didn't they love those "rag dolls."

Hug your friends for Christmas. Bake a cookie. Sing a carol. Find ways to help those with nothing see the gifts they already have in their lives.

## New Beginnings

from Gary McWhirter

I JUST SPOKE WITH RALPH HILLQUIST by telephone. Ralph is the Chairman of the Nominating Committee to select members of the next NMM Executive Committee. Ralph informed me that as of this date, November 15th, 2003, the committee had received no additional nominees for the ExComm election.

Since today is the deadline to furnish information to be published in the December Borealis, it is unlikely there will be more nominees. If there are no more, the five currently nominated, namely Sherry McNamara, Ellen Monahan, Melissa Rennie, Sue Styles and Jack Schultz will be elected without a ballot to fill the five open positions. They will then select among themselves who will assume the required positions of Local Secretary, Deputy Local Secretary and Treasurer. In my opinion, NMM will be hard pressed to choose better. All five are active and very energetic members.

Changing subjects, today being the 15th of November, it is the opening day of deer hunting season. The annual migration to northern Michigan by orange clad hunters began several days ago. Last night I heard several gunshots in the area around our home but nothing today. I'm assuming the shooting I heard last night was the last minute sighting-in of hunting rifles. Either that or they filled their tags "early" and have gone home.

On a personal note, as I mentioned earlier, the company I am employed by has been trying to sell its business and move out of northern Michigan. I have wanted to retire but have been "hanging on" because of the likelihood of a severance bonus, if and when the sale was made. It was announced early this week that a sale had been arranged and yesterday afternoon an e-mail was sent to the six employees who are eligible for an immediate pension. The entire e-mail consisted of: "Gentlemen, To get the ball rolling, please contact the benefits center (1-800-xxx-xxxx). Tell them you will be retiring on Dec. 31st and would like to get your paperwork. Let me know if you have questions."

The note seemed a rather short and impersonal message on which to end a nearly thirty-four year career. The good news is that indeed a severance bonus is to be paid and I will finally be retired. But twenty-four hours after the note, I suppose not too surprisingly, I'm feeling a little bummed.

Gary McWhirter

## Gains and Losses

### New Executive Board selected

The Nominating Committee has reported that no additional nominations to the slate of candidates for Executive Committee were received as of November 15, 2003, the deadline for submission. As a result, no ballot will be required and the following people are the elected members of our new Northern Michigan Mensa Executive Committee:

Sherry McNamara • Sue Styles • Melissa Rennie  
Jack Schultz • Ellen Monahan

The ExComm members will select the various officers from among the five on the committee.

### Three NMM Members named National Merit Semifinalists

Three Traverse City Central High School seniors, Tom Deering, Jacob Norton, and Olivia Gillham were National Merit Semifinalist based on their scores on college entrance exams.

### NMM Loses a Founder

Arthur George Montagne passed away in Traverse City on November 19, 2003, following a brief illness. Art was one of two co-founders of a local presence of Mensa in the Traverse City area back in 1978 and regularly participated in Mensa activities throughout the intervening years. Few members we have known were as broadly knowledgeable as this gentleman, and his expertise in astronomy in particular will be greatly missed. Over the years we had several star-gazing outings at his home or wherever he would cart his 8-inch telescope. Art was active with the local story-telling group also.

Back in the late-1970s or early-1980s, Art and I served as drivers for one of the Northwestern Michigan College summer courses for gifted and talented students who were studying astronomy. We drove about 12 children to the observatory at The Homestead in Glen Arbor and to the observatory south of Traverse City several times over a two-week period. While Art could have taught the course by himself, we arranged for two gifted Traverse City high school students to teach it and Art acted primarily as a mentor. One of those student teachers—Carl Ganter—joined Mensa later on.

Art was a Life Member of American Mensa Ltd. and his wit, depth of knowledge, and kindly manner will be greatly missed by those of us who knew him.

—Jack Schultz

## By Any Other Name

From Ben Stout

No. 1. Peggy's parents have five daughters. They named the first one Angela, the second one they called Cynthia, the third was Ethel, the fourth was called Gretchen. Was the fifth one's name Margaret, Isabel, Dorothy, or Pauline?

No. 2. The Eighteen Heir Puzzle: A rich man died leaving a rather peculiar request in his will. One million dollars of his fortune was to be divided among his 18 grandchildren in the following way: numbers from one to eighteen were to be written in a circle in a large room and a chair was to be placed on each number, then each grandchild was to choose a chair and sit there. A number between 1 and 10 was to be drawn and used to count off the chairs in the circle. For example if the number 5 were drawn, the count would start with the first chair, and the count would go to chair on No. 5. This person would be given \$100, and he and his chair would be removed from the circle. The count would continue on by fives and the tenth person would be given \$200 and he and the chair would be removed. As the count continues, each person counted out of the circle would receive twice the amount of the person before him. This continues until everyone is counted out, or the money is all gone, but the last person will get the odd money left in the fund.

The problem for you to solve is this: One of the heirs has a girl friend who is the secretary to the executor of the will, and she promises the boy friend that she will find out the number that is drawn for counting, and will signal him just before they choose their seats. All goes well, and she signals that the number to be used in counting out the chairs is number 7. Knowing this, what chair should the one who knows the number choose in order to get the most money?

No. 3. You have two thick ropes each about three feet long which are impregnated with fuel oil so that they will each burn completely in just an hour. Without cutting either rope, can you devise a plan so that both ropes will be burned in just 45 minutes?

No. 4. You have a three pint, a five pint, and an eight pint pitcher. The first two are empty, the pitcher holding eight pints is full of water. Can you, by pouring the water back and forth using only these three pitchers, divide the water evenly, with four pints in each of two containers?

You can email Ben Stout with your answers at: [pbstout@coslink.net](mailto:pbstout@coslink.net)

## Ninety Percent

By Ruth Minshull

AFTER GIVING A SPEECH some years ago, Theodore Sturgeon was asked if he agreed that 90% of all science fiction was crud. He replied, “Sure, 90% of science fiction is crud. That’s because 90% of everything is crud.” This became known as Sturgeon’s Law, and (for some unknown reason) is usually cited as “Ninety percent of everything is crap.”

I’ve never forgotten this law and, although I don’t actually do a count, I have applied it to many different subjects. Although my conclusions are obviously subjective, the ratio seems to hold up.

How many books do we pass up as unworthy of our time? Of the remaining ones we actually read, how many leave us with a lasting impression? I find that at least 90% are forgettable.

The percentages also hold true for paintings, music, movies, poetry, sculptures, jewelry, homes, decorations, furnishings, gismos, widgets, dohinkeys, dinosaurs, whatchamacallits and yard ornaments.

And, of course, food.

Restaurants? Oh, yes. Of all the potential eating places in our region, how many do we try out? How many become favorites?

There are also an abundance of godawful recipes. Over many years, I’ve examined recipes in books, magazines and newspapers. I’ve culled out most of them, although I try a new one now and then. Quite often I say, “Not bad,” but I know I’ll never make it again. Of course, occasionally I find keeper and that goes into the permanent file.

Sometimes I study the ghastly recipes that appear in the newspaper’s weekly food column and wonder how this food editor got the job. Is she related to the owner? Does she pay him to print her stuff? Does she have incriminating pictures?

And clothes! Often I see an article of clothing so ugly that I ask, Why would anyone design this? Having designed it, why would someone else choose to make it? Finally, after it has bullied its way into a retail store, why would anyone buy it and wear it? Eventually it ends up as a tacky offering in a garage sale

where the current owner optimistically hopes that still another misguided soul will agree to pay the asking price of \$2.00 for it.

I remember reading a magazine several years ago which featured their picks for the best and worst-dressed celebrities. On the last page of the best-dressed section there was a photo of Jackie Onassis, looking stunningly elegant in a white suit, wearing a single strand of pearls. On the next page (the beginning of the worst dressed) appeared a very wealthy, well-known woman who looked like a glittering, gaudy, over-decorated Christmas tree. I’m certain the juxtaposition was no accident. Clearly, the magazine was making the point that riches alone do not beget good taste.

When I miss—that is—I go to a restaurant I don’t like, see a totally bum movie or try a recipe that turns out to be unfit for hog slop-I shrug my shoulders and say, “Well, that’s in the 90%.”

Amazing, the 90% stuff continues to be designed, created, manufactured, marketed, bought and sold. Does this mean that 90% of the population prefer crap?

Of course, I haven’t even touched on the disconcerting fact that each of us would select different thingamanannies to drop into one side or the other of our own 90% line. This suggests that one man’s crap is another man’s treasure.

Possibly there’s something important to learn here, but I’m not sure what it is.

*Editor’s Note: At Ruth’s request her column is reprinted exactly as it was submitted.*

## Roaming the Region

by Charlie Bruce (aka Gloater)

Every now and then you have to stop whatever you're doing and fix something. And so it is currently in the house of American Mensa. As you probably read last month, our Certificate of Incorporation (C of I) is not in compliance with the laws of the state of New York and has not been ever since it was written. Aware of the situation, we are now ethically and legally bound to take corrective action.

So, what is the problem? It seems that by not specifying otherwise our C of I requires that a quorum be present at the Annual Business Meeting for any business to be conducted; and that quorum is 50% of the current membership, physically present. Can you imagine approximately 26,000 Mensans at an AG? Fat chance. Also, ballots by mail are not legitimate, however proxies are.

The proposed solution, therefore, is to amend the C of I to set the quorum at a reasonably achievable number (in this case: 100) and to also include appropriate provisions to allow mail ballots in the election of AMC members. In order to do this, we must collect proxies from at least 50% of the current membership. Both hard copy and electronic proxies will be allowed, but the easiest way to submit your proxy is to log on to the AML web site (<http://www.us.mensa.org/>) and click on the ProxyQuest link on the right side of the home page. Then, using the current User Name and Password as found inside the front cover of the Mensa Bulletin, enter your membership number, verify your name, read the directions, and submit. Nothing to it. You can then check the proxy counts from all of the groups by clicking on the "Proxies by Group" link.

As of this writing, there have been 160 proxies submitted with Region 3 leading the pack with 52 of them (from 10 of 16 groups.) We had the first group, Columbus, to reach 10, followed shortly thereafter by Cincinnati and SEMM. No other group is in double digits yet. Help spread the word. Will your group be the first to reach its 50% point? Oh, and have a Happy Holiday Season.

*EDITOR'S NOTE: In early November Charlie Bruce sought Jack Schultz's help to get out the vote in Mensa's national ProxyQuest. You have responded. Not only did we begin voting almost immediately after Jack wrote us. We've kept up the pace. As of November 24, 2003, 51 out of 99 Northern Michigan Mensa members had submitted their proxies on-line for a total of 51.5%. Most groups are in the 5-15% range and the next closest is 32%. To use the vernacular, NMM rocks.*

## Northern Michigan Mensa Executive Committee

### VOTING MEMBERS

Local Secretary:	Gary L. McWhirter	231-258-4390	glmcwhirter@shellopus.com
Deputy Local Secretary:	Thomas M. Barnhart	231-946-3242	tmb@traverse.net
Treasurer:	Ellen Monahan	231-929-9281	emonahan@chartermi.net
At-Large Member:	John D. Schultz	231-275-6735	nwoodpc@chartermi.net
At-Large Member:	Lotus Young	231-843-8479	ldwyong@chartermi.net

### APPOINTED MEMBERS

Membership Officer, Proctor Coordinator and Proctor:			
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Scholarship Coordinator:	Lotus Young	231-843-8479	ldwyong@chartermi.net
Publications Officer and Newsletter Editor:			
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Regional Vice Chairman	Charles Bruce	614-237-4228	rvc3@us.mensa.org
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check out our website at: [www.nmm.us.mensa.org](http://www.nmm.us.mensa.org)



# Borealis

Northern Michigan Mensa

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