

St. Damian students help prepare boxes for troops

ANGELS

Continued from page A1

me and told me to call them Miracle boxes." Downs prep the children for their work, asking questions about freedom.

"Freedom isn't free, you have to fight for it," said third-grader Joey Beahon of Plymouth in response to her question.

The students also said the Pledge of Allegiance and the Lord's Prayer before lining up to get a box and then work their way along tables filled with food, hygiene products, snacks, books, CDs and videos, a rosary, American flag and a phone card. Much of the items were collected by students as a project during Catholic Schools Week or were donated by members of St. Damian Parish and its cluster parish, St. Theodore's.

Downs makes sure the contents are American-made, right down to the socks. She has her connections. Socks Man Ed, a sock distributor out of West Bloomfield, provides socks made in mills in Alabama. The Family Christian Bookstore provides Bibles bought by its patrons, a Girl Scout troop from Lone Pine Elementary in West Bloomfield the cookies, and the Everest Academy in Clarkston plastic drinking mugs to fill with hot chocolate and Crystal Light drink mixes.

Each of the boxes also included a phone card provided by Mikie's Minutes, a fund set up by the father of fallen soldier Sgt. Michael Ingram Jr. to ensure soldiers can make free phone calls home.

Special touches were cards and letters the students made for the troops as well as a letter from the school. There's also a group picture of the students letting the soldiers know who they are.

"I've ever done this," said Tamara Sabbagh of Westland. "It makes me feel good about myself because I'm helping the soldiers."

Logan Tarla of Redford and Colin Arban of Garden City were the first to fill a box. They had to admit by the time they got to Downs who taped it close it was heavy. While get a reduced rate for packages headed for the troops, a filled box can cost Downs around \$14.

"He held the box a little bit and then I took over, but we both go to pick the items," said Colin. "It was only fair. It feels nice to help out when you know they're defending our country."

Addison Fox of Westland is a veteran of doing care packages. In the past, she's done it for the homeless in Detroit. She worked with her buddy, Trenton Mielke of Plymouth.

"It's good to help our soldiers," she said.

"I think it's good we can give back to the soldiers because they do so much for us and we can remind them of home," added John Giagrande of Garden City. "I think the best part is the cards and letters from the kids. In my letter, I thanked them for serving and told them they were in my prayers."

During Catholic Schools week, each classroom adopted a homebound senior citizen from here and St. Theodore, said Stempin. They wrote letters, made cards and filled baskets with food. "It was so touching to see the seniors, they were lonesome, but the students showed them they're not forgotten people," she said.

The Miracle boxes was such a success that Stempin plans to do it again next year so the students can continue to do community outreach.

"I'm really proud of them," said Stempin.



Louise Downs works on taping up the boxes the students filled.

ABOUT DESERT ANGELS

Desert Angels collect, pack and mail needed items to the troops, always including words of encouragement and hope and adding extra items to pass out to the native people of the countries where they are stationed. The boxes show the troops they are not forgotten in deeds, not just words.

Miracle Boxes are care packages for American troops serving overseas. They contain a variety of items, including socks, pocket foods, letters from home and "a whole lot of love." Also in each Miracle Box is a "Prayer Cloth" or "Pocket Flag" reminding the troops, we are praying for them. They are called "Miracle Boxes" in honor of Pfc. Joseph A. Miracle, a Michigan soldier who gave his life defending his unit.

Donations are always welcome, and supplies are always needed: breakfast bars, granola bars, instant breakfast Tang, dry Gator Aid, nuts, Life Savers, hard candy, cereal, oatmeal, coffee-flavored dry creamer, dried fruit, beef jerky, Rice Krispy Treats, gum, Pop Tarts, instant foods, tea, new socks, cards, letters of encouragement, fun stuff and blank cards they can send to their loved ones. Monetary donations also are needed. Each box costs about \$15 to mail. And people can help by participating in a packing party or hosting a packing party.

Desert Angels Inc. is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. Donations can be sent to Louise "Desert Angel" Downs, Desert Angels, Inc., P.O. Box 210455, Auburn Hills, MI 48321, or online at www.thedesertangel.org. For more information, call (248) 736-6403 or send an e-mail to office@thedesertangel.org.



Addison Fox of Westland thinks "it's good to help the troops."

Feels 'good'
"This is the first time

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Allysha Potts of Redford selects a magazine to include in her box.



Landen Nabozny of Garden City and Brandon Lopez of Livonia carry their box over to get it sealed for shipment to the troops.



Aaron Taylor of Garden City checks out a Sports Illustrated magazine bound for U.S. troops serving in harm's way overseas.



Jeff James of Auburn Hills loads Miracle boxes into a covered trailer donated to Desert Angels by the American Trailer Co. in Waterford.

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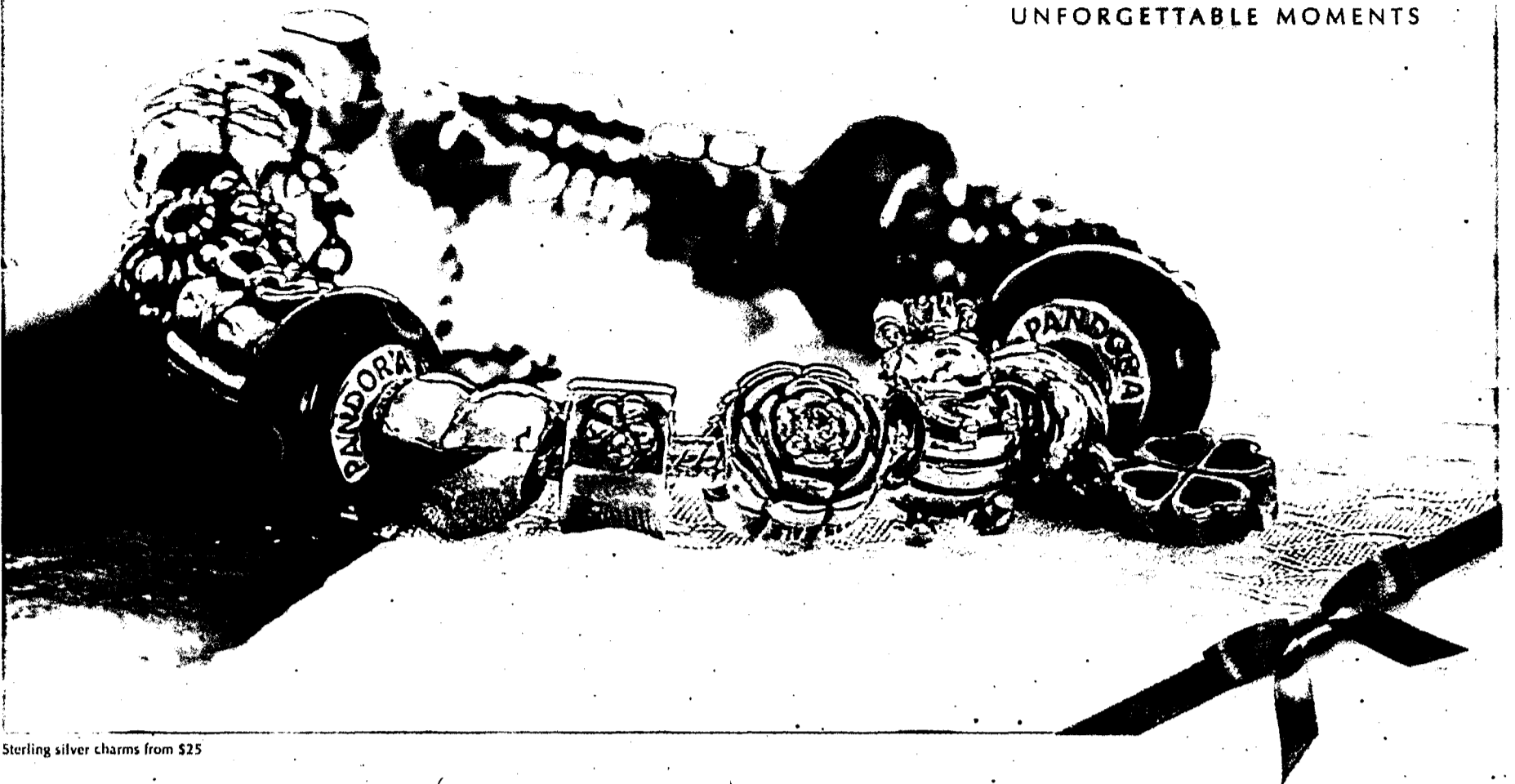
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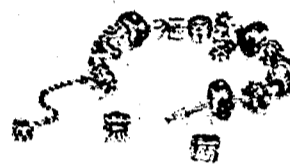


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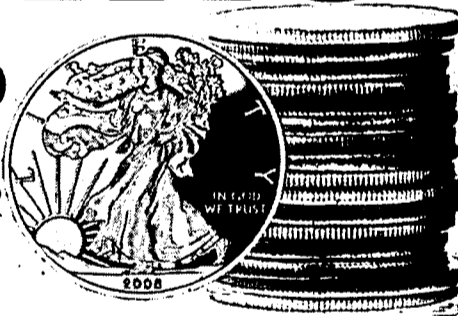
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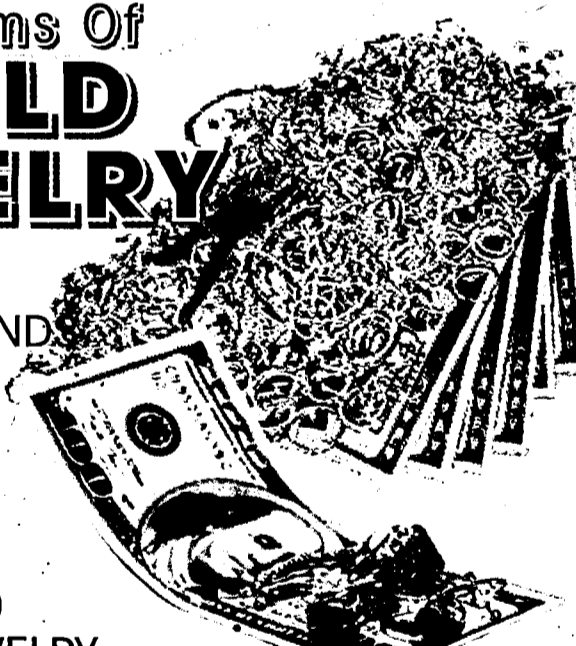
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Celebrate Irish culture with food, music, dance

By Sharon Dargay
 O&E Staff Writer

More than 40 dancers and 20 musicians will keep toes tapping and hands clapping for nine hours at the 27th annual St. Patrick's Day Irish Fest in Westland.

"We've got five fiddlers; banjo, flutes, harp, piano, pipes. We've all played together for years. A lot of them are my former students. They're in college and are coming home to play," said Mick Gavin, musician, fiddle teacher and the Redford resident who founded the annual gathering.

"The whole thing has blossomed over the years into this production. We really don't have a set program. It's word of mouth — you're up in a half hour or you'll be on at 4:30 p.m. or the step dancers are coming, so we need a piano player and a couple of fiddlers on. It's not as complicated as one might think. We're all very familiar with each other. It's more comfortable there than in a crowded pub. There's a big dance floor, a big stage, and no drunks. It's totally different."

Gavin is proud of the family-friendly atmosphere at the event, which will start at 3 p.m. Saturday, March 17 at the Hellenic Cultural Center, 36375 Joy, east of Newburgh, Westland.

"I wanted to have a cultural day for children and families. It's just a great family day. It's for the community."

A cash bar will be available, but plenty of food will be served, too. The menu includes Emer-



Holland Raper will be among the musicians at the 27th annual St. Patrick's Day Irish Fest in Westland.

27TH ANNUAL ST. PATRICK'S DAY IRISH FEST

What: A music, food and dance celebration of Irish culture

When: 3 p.m.-midnight, Saturday, March 17

Where: Hellenic Cultural Center, 36375 Joy, east of Newburgh, Westland

Details: Irish traditional musicians, singers and dancers; cash bar and Irish food available for purchase

Admission: \$10 at the door; children 14 and under admitted free

ald Isle favorites such as corned beef sandwiches, dinners and Irish stew, along with hot dogs and pizza.

Dancers, fiddlers

Dancers from Ardan Academy of Irish Dance and O'Hare School of Irish Dance in Plymouth will perform. Siblings and dance champions,



Members of Crossroads Ceili perform last December at The Ark in Ann Arbor. They'll play traditional Irish songs this Saturday in Westland.

Brian and Megan McParland, who now also teach dance, will be on hand.

"Holland Raper," from the Berklee School in Boston (Mass.) will be there. Holland is one of my former students. Since she was 9, I went to her home and taught her for four hours every week in one sitting, which is unusual for a 9- or 10-year-old," Gavin said. "I would ask, 'Are you tired?' And she'd say no."

In addition to Raper and Gavin on fiddle, Gavin's son Michael will play fiddle and banjo and his wife, Colleen will play flute, whistle and Irish pipes. Other musi-

cians will include Kelsey Lutz on fiddle, Lance Wagner on fiddle, Balladeer Eddie McGlinchey with vocals, guitarist Column Paige, Ray Maguire with vocals and guitar, the Dolowy family of Plymouth with fiddle and dancing, Cape Breton pianist Tom MacNeil and his son, Callum on Highland pipes.

"They enjoy the camaraderie of being on the big stage," Gavin said, referring to the musicians.

Planning a party

For several years before he founded the annual St. Patrick's Day event, Gavin began

building an audience for Irish music by inviting musicians to play concerts locally.

"I used to get phone calls in November and December trying to book me for St. Patrick's Day. 'Could you come out and play some tunes?' I finally said, 'Listen, why not get a hall and get all these musicians together and have a St. Patrick's Day party?'"

"Twenty-seven years later we have St. Patrick's Day (Irish Fest)," Gavin said. "It's in a big hall that holds 1,000. The retirees come in around 3 p.m. to see the dancing and hear music. Families come in around 5-6 p.m.

They like to eat first and then let the kids dance around and watch the dancers."

Musicians will play from 3-4:30, followed by dance performances that are scheduled to end at approximately 9:30 p.m. Musicians will take the stage again and play until midnight.

Musicians will play traditional favorites, take requests and even sing *Happy Birthday* if anyone in the audience is celebrating.

A raffle also will be held to raise funds for Ardan Academy dancers who plan to compete in world competition this year.

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Art

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Time/Date: 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Monday-Friday, through April 13; meet-the-artist reception, 6-9 p.m. Monday, March 19
 Location: In the Costick Center, 28600 W. 11 Mile, Farmington Hills
 Details: Unique, edgy paper dress creations made of entirely recycled materials by artist Matt Richmond. Richmond's materials vary from plastic Kroger bags to Target holiday wrapping paper. The exhibit also features a wide array of fashion images by various photographers, starring Richmond's designs
 Contact: (248) 473-1856



Paper dresses by Matt Richmond are on display through April 13 in Farmington Hills.

DETROIT INSTITUTE OF ARTS

Time/Dates: 2 p.m. Sundays
 Location: 5200 Woodward, Detroit
 Details: Target Family Sundays, storytelling, performances, free with admission
 Exhibits: Detroit Revealed: Photographs 2000-2010, an exhibit of 50 photos through April 8; Gift of a Lifetime: The James Pearson Duffy Collection of drawings, paintings, prints, sculptures and photographs through March 18
 Contact: (313) 833-7900, www.dia.org



Devil's Night Dames captain Yo-Yo, greets fans at Masonic Temple in Detroit. Her team will take on reigning champion roller derby team, the Detroit Pistoffs, Saturday, March 17.

NORTHVILLE ART HOUSE

Time/Date: Through March 23
 Location: 215 W. Cady, Northville
 Details: Call for entries for the 4th Annual West of Center All-Media Show. Applications with jpgs on CDs must be hand-delivered or shipped to the Northville Art House to arrive by March 23. Applications are available on the Art House website at www.northvillearts.org. The show will open June 1

Current exhibit: Anarchy of the Line; Drawing Comes of Age features works by 14 artists, through March 24.
 Contact: (248) 344-0497 or e-mail to arthouseoffice@northvillearts.org

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Time/Date: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday, noon-5 p.m. Sunday, through May 20
 Location: University of Michigan Museum of Art, 525 S. State, Ann Arbor
 Details: "Fluxus and the Essential Questions of Life," includes more than 100 works by major artists, such as Yoko Ono, Nam June Paik and George Maciunas; admission is free.
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Benefit

LSO TEA

Time/Date: 2-4 p.m. Sunday, March 18
 Location: Livonia Marriott Inn, located between Newburgh and I-275 off Six Mile, Livonia
 Details: First annual tea event to celebrate the "wearing of the green" with great food, fun, prizes and Irish music. Tickets are \$30 and benefit the Livonia Symphony Orchestra. Reservations due Thursday, March 25
 Contact: www.livoniasymphony.org; (734) 522-1687

Hear pirate tunes at barbershop chorus show

Harmony Town Chorus will pillage and plunder its way in song across the seven seas, 3 p.m., Sunday, March 25 at Thurston High School, 26255 Schoolcraft, Redford.

The buccaneer-themed "A Pirate's Life," concert will feature a play set to music as the Chorus sings pirate songs, hunts for buried treasure and finds a safe harbor where they can end their journey.

Ebb 'N' Flow, the 2011 District Quartet champions, and Harmony Town's quartet, Impulse, also will perform.

Tickets are \$13 in advance and \$15 at the door.

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Tony Pyrkosz (left), Paul Michalik, Frank Adams, and Don Bohnwagner get into the spirit of their upcoming concert, "A Pirate's Life," Sunday, March 25, in Redford.

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CITY BITES

Bon appétit

FARMINGTON HILLS — The staff and students of Oakland Community College's Culinary Studies Institute will prepare an "April in Paris" dinner Thursday, April 5, at OCC's Orchard Ridge Campus, located on Orchard Lake Road just south of I-696. The six-course meal highlights French foods and wine and will begin with passed hors d'oeuvres at 6 p.m. A cash bar also will be featured. Tickets are \$60 per person. The event will feature entertainment typical of a French bistro and the Culinary Studies Institute Bakery will be open, offering French pastries to take home, or enjoy on site. Participants may "dress to impress" (men in ties, and women in pearls) in their favorite French attire, including berets. Get a ticket order form at www.oaklandcc.edu/culinary, or by calling Maureen Gilbert at (248) 522-3700. Checks should be made out to Oakland Community College.

Vegan chef

WEST BLOOMFIELD — Henry Ford West Bloomfield Hospital will offer a vegan cooking class with Chef George Vutetakis, executive chef at Garden Fresh Gourmet, 6:30-8 p.m. Wednesday, March 28, in the demonstration kitchen at the hospital, 6777 W. Maple. Registration will close 72 hours before the start of class. Cost is \$19. The class will feature recipes from Vutetakis' *Vegetarian Traditions: Favorite Recipes from My Years at the Legendary Inn Season Café* cookbook. Vutetakis, who learned to cook in his Greek grandmother's kitchen, doesn't try to imitate meat in his cooking but instead focuses on fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts and beans. He works with local organic farmers, whom he credits as the heroes behind the creation of his sustainable, healthy cuisine. To register or for more information call (248) 325-3890, or e-mail dk@hfhfs.org.

Wine tasting

LIVONIA — Learn to guess what's in the glass using all your senses at a wine tasting at 7 p.m. Thursday, March 29 at d.vine wines, 17386 Haggerty. You'll learn about terrier, grape varietals, growing regions, and how winemaking techniques can affect how the wine presents itself. Cost is \$15 per person; \$10 for Wine Club members. Call (734) 432-3800 for reservations; www.dvinefinewines.com.

Preaching the wonders of coffee

By Dan Dean
Staff Columnist

I am a believer. I once was lost, but now am saved from the lousy coffee syndrome that has taken a firm hold on the psyche of our fast-paced, have-to-have everything on the go, society.



Coffee Preacher

Dan Dean

I am here to preach the virtues of quality coffee. Maybe it's the fact that I am starting down at my 50th birthday and

I am tired of the push for more and more — whether in food portions or drink sizes. I would rather spend more money for real quality in smaller portions. And this is most evident in the coffee I choose to drink.

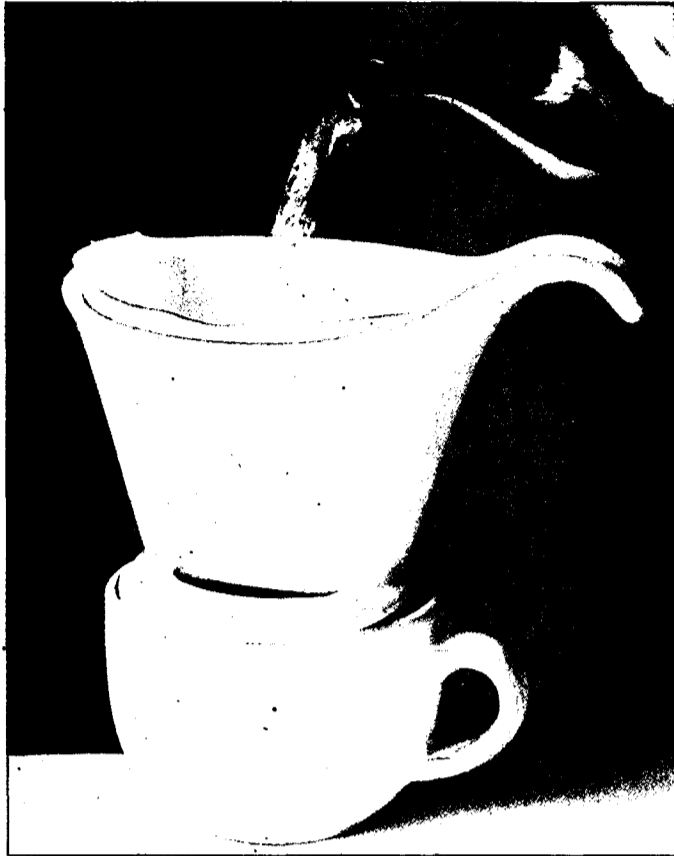
Like most people who make life-changing adjustments, I was near the bottom. Oh sure, those around me thought that I was in coffee heaven. I owned my own coffee shop and had access to all the coffee and espresso one could drink. And while on the outside I had a beautiful, supportive wife and three amazing kids — and one killer coffee shop — inside I had a stirring deep in my soul. I knew that there had to be better coffee.

Let the blind see

I had read about the comparisons of coffee to wine and on the surface it sounded plausible — both wine and coffee are made from an agricultural crop. And as I had read, the very nuances that give grapes their distinct flavor profiles that show up in wine — things like soil quality, altitude, climate and processing methods — all can be identified in coffee beans.

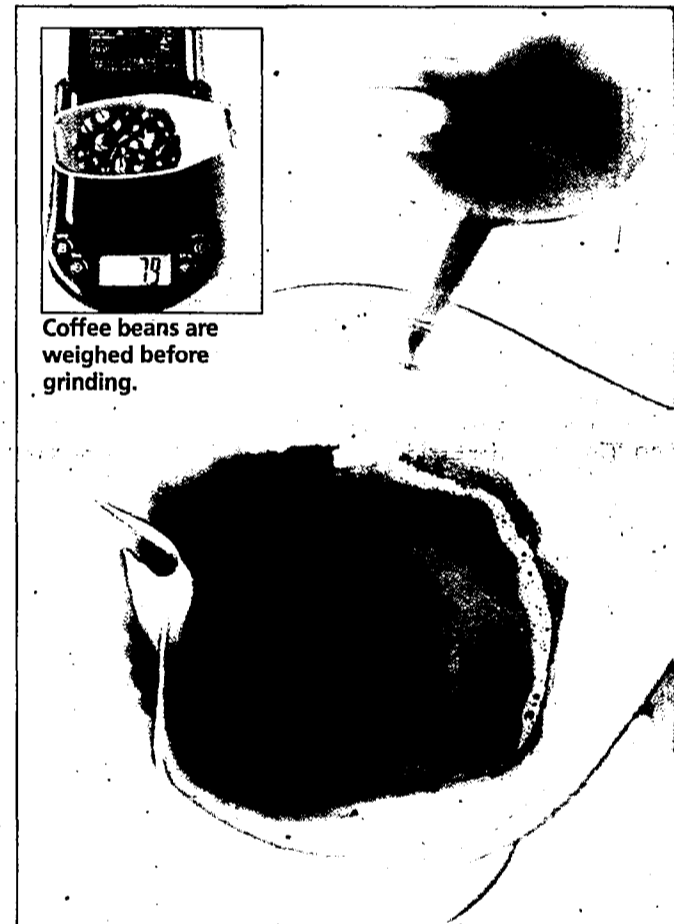
I was still a skeptic, until another recovering photojournalist/coffee guy sent me a pound of coffee that opened my eyes. With alleluias ringing in my head, I sipped the pure blissfulness that originated from a farm in Panama. That coffee from Jeff Taylor at PT's Coffee in Topeka, Kan., is the one that I now blame for occasional impulse purchases of \$25 and even up to \$50 for a half-pound of coffee.

The reality is — in the long run — to truly appreciate and savor coffee can



PHOTOS BY DAN DEAN

Using coffee from a local roaster less than a week old, a small 4-oz. cup, filtered water and a single brewing device like the Bee House ceramic dripper pictured above is a wonderful way to appreciate all coffee has to offer in flavor and aroma.



Coffee beans are weighed before grinding.

Crafting one small cup of coffee at a time using fresh roasted and fresh ground coffee, is a sensory overload well worth the few minutes it takes to brew.

be a cost savings, especially if you are accustomed to parting with \$4 or \$5 for a sugary 24-ounce concoction that has little resemblance to the agricultural product.

Walk the road less traveled

My journey started long ago, when I gave up the can for Eight O'clock whole

bean coffee from A&P ground at home in a \$10 grinder. But it was when I became aware of the care and hard work it takes to produce coffee that I truly started to walk the walk. The coffee we drink — except for the kind still sold as ground coffee in a can — is the seed of cherries grown at a high altitude, requiring the cherries to be picked and sorted by hand. There are different methods of removing the pulp to reveal the seed, which ultimately is the coffee bean, that is mostly a manual process as well, depending on the method used.

It is a labor of love and hard work for farmers trying to eke out a living for their families. But there are roasters like my friend Jeff Taylor who are working directly with farmers to produce better crops and hence a contract to pay a higher price for beans. These Direct Trade relationships are making a better life for the producers and a better cup for consumers.

There is something special that happens when the correct weight of beans — ground just right — is united with the correct weight of filtered 201.5-degree water. The combination produces a mouth-watering aroma from pungent steam resulting in a beautiful, creamy, sweet, slurry of goodness. It may take a leap of faith to start your walk along a path to appreciating a smaller quantity of quality coffee — but the payoff in the end is likely more money in your pocket and more money for coffee farmers.

Unravel the mystery

It is a miracle to behold and worth the leap of faith that will unlock your senses to a new way of thinking about coffee.

Next month: Think I am crazy for spending \$50 on a bag of coffee? I am not the only one.

Dan Dean, assistant managing editor of presentation for the Observer & Eccentric and Hometown Newspapers, is a former independent coffee shop owner. He can be reached by e-mail at ddean@hometownlife.com.

Find a premium pour at the local watering hole

The cover story of the latest installment of *Draft Magazine* highlights the 100 Best Beer Bars in America. The Midwest district is well represented by Michigan establishments worthy of the coveted award. Many are located outside the distribution of this paper but still worth a visit for those seeking beer enlightenment further than the front porch. The Hop Cat in Grand Rapids comes highly recommended for those looking for premium pours with a casual vibe.

The premise behind Beer Tracker is to bring attention to what many consider the best beer in the world, and more importantly where these selections can be obtained locally. Piqued with enough interest, a visit to the local liquor store would be warranted by



Beer Tracker

Nate Parsons

the reader, then back home for a private tasting. Although enjoying a world class beverage in the comfort of home has benefits, venturing out to the local watering hole has its upside.

Navigating today's drinking landscape for those looking for a premium pour is a hit or miss proposition with no guarantees. While there is no silver bullet to satisfy all, there are those who make a conscious effort to cater to the beer enthusiast.

Hermann's Olde Town Grille - Plymouth

Hermann's is considered by most the quintessential neighborhood pub, the type of place that demonstrates the "social lubricity" a couple of good pints can facilitate. Someday it will become desirable and even fashionable for every town to have a local neighborhood pub. Until then, Hermann's will have to suffice. Not known for an extensive tap line, Franziskaner, a traditional German Hefe-Weisse brewed



by Spaten Brau always is present. Upon delivery the body is cloudy orange, as hints of lemon, honey, and clove scents drift from the glass. Taste is citrusy and refreshing, perfect for the summer but enjoyed year around.

Pizzeria Biga - Farmington Hills

The idea of beer and pizza starts the mouth watering like

punch at 9% ABV. The robust flavor yet silky delivery is an intoxicating tonic for those looking to graduate from a traditional Guinness.

Ashley's Pub - Westland

Boasting 101 beers, Ashley's is the place when looking for sheer quantity and quality. Truly a world class selection from local product to premium sippers from abroad. The draught line changes daily with rotating Belgium, US Craft, Michigan Craft, and Beer of the Month selections. Piraat, a Belgium IPA from Brouwerij Van Steenberghe is a mainstay on tap. Served in the proper glassware Piraat shimmers smoky orange with a snowy white head. Layers of bready malts and citrus wash the mouth and exit with a crisp finish. A slice of heaven in our own backyard.

Just a few of my favorites! Tell me yours? Cheers!

Nate Parsons can be contacted at mdevin@yahoo.com

