

News from Small Town (Tawas)

Middle America

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by Michael Gilfix

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Small Town Celebration of Veterans

This issue of the newspaper devoted a separate section to “Celebrating Our Veterans.” The section is 12 pages long. In addition to articles about memorial activities, it includes three pages, each with about 56 photos of individuals from Iosco County who served in the military. There are 154 veteran’s photos in all. They include one of my high school teachers, Eugene Hickman. They do not include a photo of my brother who served in the Navy.

Small towns contribute a disproportionate share of volunteers in the military. Honoring veterans and elevating fundamental passions alike.

Hunting Season – Big Buck Bananza

The Iosco County newspaper is again sponsoring its *Big Buck Bananza* where the winner gets a Ruger 36902 American Std. Bolt Rifle 350 Legend Grain Predator 22 Inch, valued at about \$700. Heralded as one of the oldest “Big Buck” contests in Northern Michigan, the prize is based on “field-dressed weight, number of antler points, and antler spread.” *One problem with deer season in East Tawas: if you need a plumber or an electrician, good luck. Most of them moved to the area so that they could go hunting. Virtually all of them are hunting.*

Thanksgiving Dinner at Mama’s Country Kitchen

For \$14.99, you get your choice of turkey, baked ham, stuffed pork chop, roasted chicken, or stuffed Cornish hen. You get soup, salad, potato, and pumpkin pie.

Another deal: at The Big Boy, pan fried perch or a steak dinner with sides was available for only \$14.99.

If you can’t afford that, free thanksgiving dinners are offered at the Methodist Church where they offer plates “heaping with delicious food.”

Paper Airplane Contest, Brain Child of a Tawas High School Sophomore

This will take place on the grounds of the airport that was previously the US Air Force airport. The article specifically invites home-schooled kids to participate. (My guess is that many kids in the area are home-schooled by parents not happy with public education)

Wild Caught Perch at Klenow’s - \$19.95 lb

If you've never had pan fried perch, you have to try it. Ideally, you will travel to East Tawas to sit down for your meal.

Searching for Bear Dens

Hunters and hikers are asked to look for bear dens while they are in the woods. This is a state project to find the bears, sedate them, and fit them with tags so they can be tracked. Bears are very common in the area, raiding gardens and bird feeders.

Want Some Free Sheep?

An add in the newspaper offers five free sheep – 4 females and 1 male. If you are interested, get in touch with me and I will give you the phone number.

Small Town Halloween Festivities

In addition to trick-or-treaters swarming the streets, there was a parade in downtown East Tawas, music, and costume contests. Unique in small towns is the fact that the gatherings attract people who know each other. There is virtually no anonymity. This contributes to civil behavior, shared jocularly, and a reinforced sense of community. I don't want to idealize it, but these are elements we just don't see in large communities where participation in such events can be isolating even in the midst of crowds.

Fishing Report

I am stunned. For the first time in memory, there is no fishing report in the newspaper. What are anglers to do?

Notes from the Author

The Goal of my Tawas News is to educate and amuse you about my home town, East Tawas, Michigan. It is to remind you that small towns still thrive in America, that they are sometimes struggling, often vibrant. It is based on my hometown weekly newspaper, personal memories, and occasional, very personal observations.

The Inspiration: The inspiration was Garrison Keillor's "News from Lake Wobegon" on his NPR show, Prairie Home Companion. Lake Wobegon was fictional, quietly poignant and lol enjoyable.

Tawas is not fictional; it is very real. It is similar to Lake Wobegon in many ways – the farmers, the pastors, the community where everybody knows everybody's business.

The town of East Tawas is located on Lake Huron on the lower peninsula about 110 miles north of Flint, Michigan. The population is around 2,723. It hasn't grown much from my childhood in the 50's and 60's. The adjacent town of Tawas City has a population of about 1,726. Why 2 separate towns? Don't ask.

So, enjoy, and let me know what you think. Share it with friends and family. I am happy to add anyone to the mailing list, so send me names.

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