

**Saginaw
100 years ago**

■ **Two boarders got in a tiff at Robert Gowry's rooming house.** They argued about who got to wash up and shave first in the bathroom they shared.

Today in history

■ **In 1945, President Franklin D. Roosevelt died in Warm Springs, Ga.**

■ **Please see Bygone Days, Page 4.**

Pets of the week

■ **Meet Bitsy**, a female Labrador retriever, and **Lexie**, a spaniel mix female. Bitsy is very affectionate and walks well on a leash. Lexie is friendly, loves to give kisses. To adopt these dogs or another pet, call the Saginaw County Animal Care Center, 1312 Gratiot, at 797-4504.



Bitsy



Lexie

Today's birthdays

■ **Singer-guitarist Brendon Urie** of Panic At The Disco is 22. Actress **Shannen Doherty** is 38. Singer **Amy Ray** of the Indigo Girls is 45. Country singer **Vince Gill** is 52. Talk show host **David Letterman** is 62. Musician **Herbie Hancock** is 69.



David Letterman

Nature NOTES



Janea Little, senior naturalist
Chippewa Nature Center

■ **If you are unhappy about house sparrows using nest boxes** you intended for bluebirds, try putting out multiple boxes. Closely monitor those used by house sparrows, regularly removing all but ONE egg.

If you destroy the nest or remove all of the eggs, the sparrows will abandon that box and take over one already being used by bluebirds. The female sparrow won't incubate until the entire clutch is laid, so by leaving one egg, you can trick her into sticking with that box and just keep laying eggs that never get hatched.

■ **Do you have a question to ask the Chippewa naturalist? If so, write to the address at the bottom of this column.**

■ **The Gallery** is a place to look, learn and yes, laugh. Please send your stories and photos to:

The Gallery, The Saginaw News, 203 S. Washington, Saginaw, MI 48607; or e-mail: living@thesaginawnews.com.

■ **The Saginaw News** is committed to accuracy. If you have a question or comment about a Living Section or Neighbors Section report, please contact me, Ken Tabacsko, features editor, 776-9705, or ktabacsko@thesaginawnews.com.

Saginaw Underwater Explorers celebrates 50 years.

SUE WHITE
THE SAGINAW NEWS

Bruce A. Beckert remembers where he was when astronauts Buzz Aldrin and Neil Armstrong took their first steps on the moon in 1969.

"We were diving at a shipwreck on Isle Royale, and we stopped to watch it on a television at the lodge up there," said Beckert, 79, of Saginaw. "Then we just continued our dive.

"It's like another world itself diving up there; after the clear water and shipwrecks around Isle Royale, you almost don't want to go anywhere else."

And though he admits he hasn't "gotten wet" in 20 years, he's one of many who will help the Saginaw Underwater Explorers celebrate its 50th anniversary this year. A charter member, Beckert started taking lessons in the pool at the old YMCA on Michigan and Ames when the club formed in 1959 and in the years since, he's held just about every office in the longest-running diving club in Michigan.

"That was the year I was born," chuckled its current president, Mike K. Fabish, 50, of Thomas Township. But between talking with older members such as Beckert and John R. Garner, and his own underwater experiences, he's championed the club for the past 11 years.

You might catch him diving in a limestone quarry in Ohio, scooping out everything from tractor-trailer trucks to air-planes placed there for fun.

Another time, he might go into the Wetland Pond exhibit at the Children's Zoo at Celebration Square to scrape algae from the glass. Or you can catch him at Fashion Square Mall, demonstrating his skills in a portable tank, or hosting an underwater pumpkin-carving competition. He's a member of the Saginaw Marine Dive Reserve, too, helping the Saginaw County Sheriff's Department in its rescue and retrieval efforts.

"It's a very disciplined way of looking down there, very methodical in water where there's usually no visibility," Fabish said.

Members, one time at a record of 70-plus and now at a respectable 36 and growing, practice skin-diving — also known as snorkeling — and scuba-diving with tanks in available pools when they can't hit Michigan's rivers and lakes.

They wear wet suits, which allows a thin layer of water, warmed by body heat, between the diver's skin and synthetic rubber, and dry suits, worn over a wool garment similar to a snowmobile suit.

"Then you have some who



DAVID A. SOMMERS/THE SAGINAW NEWS

Scuba diver Don Storck, 67, of Hemlock cleans the underwater windows in the Wetland Pond exhibit at The Children's Zoo at Celebration Square in Saginaw.



Justin Fabish, 24, of Thomas Township surfaces after a dive to the Mary Alice B., 90 feet below. The tugboat sank in 1975 in Lake Huron. He is a member of the Saginaw Underwater Explorers.

DAVID A. SOMMERS/THE SAGINAW NEWS

do the free-diving explorations, where you take a deep breath and like a whale go down 20 feet or so until you have to surface for air," Fabish said. "Some people can hold their breath for five to six minutes, easily."

Michigan offers great diving opportunities, with the frigid temperatures of the fresh-water Great Lakes preserving hundreds of shipwrecks under their waves.

"You really need something to look at since we don't have reefs and caves," he said. "It would get boring looking at sand and gravel, but with more than 150 wrecks around Alpena alone, we have lots of places to go.

"And the main reason for joining the club is to hang out with other divers and tell them 'Hey, let's go!'"

Then there's the club's air compressor, where members can refill their scuba tanks at reduced prices.

"We don't do formal education," Fabish said, "and we don't teach classes. It's about recreation and camaraderie. And we take lots of pictures; most of us have some sort of underwater photography."

Don A. Cunningham, 64, of Saginaw Township says he has about 40 to 50 shipwrecks in his log book, many visited with members of the club he joined in 1976.

"Some people have this misconception of the ships with sails still waving in the water, but it's not true," he said. "You might find the deck cabins blown off and other damage from the sinking.

"But when you see the paint on the bulkhead, when you realize this is a piece of history from 100 years ago, and you're touching it and feeling it for yourself, it's a totally different world."

Like Beckert, he's a fan of the wrecks around Isle Royale, such as the American, with its load of frames for Model T Fords still intact.

"For the most part, you go and look but you don't touch," he said. "We say a silent prayer for the men who went down in the wreck, too, though I haven't really run into that."

It was watching Lloyd Bridges as Mike Nelson in the '60s television series "Sea Hunt" and then the adventures of Jacques Cousteau that

drew Cunningham into diving.

"My first dive was in homemade equipment, going down about 20 or 30 feet," he remembered. "I would go in lakes and rivers and look at the fish, and after diving around shipwrecks for years, I'm back to the rock formations and fish again, back to where I started."

Garner, 65, of Bay City was a student at Arthur Hill High School when he joined the club in 1959, "and there's about three of us still alive," he said, though he doesn't dive anymore.

"The equipment is more specialized today, more technical and so much safer. I bought my first scuba rig myself for \$125, which would probably buy a mask and snorkel today. I would dive with no exposure suit on, and, oh, yeah, that was cold."

His first wet suit he bought came in a kit, with slabs of neoprene and supply of glue to put it together, "and that served me well because I learned how to repair my own suits later on."

The dives were a family affair in the beginning, with husbands and wives diving

and children playing nearby. No one was pressured to dive, he said, because, to panic underwater is to die.

Later, he said, the club's focus turned to shipwrecks and that wasn't as conducive to family involvement. But, as with many of the older members, Garner still has a son active in the sport.

"I'm still a life member, and I go to meetings, infrequently, to give my four-cents worth," he said, chuckling. "And I watch the shows on the Discovery Channel, exploring shipwrecks. Toward the end, I did some underwater videos myself, and some of mine are better than what I'm seeing on TV."

Though Beckert is into experimental aircraft these days, his son, Eric, still dives wherever he's stationed with the forestry service. And Beckert only needs to look up Cousteau's film "The Silent World" to remember his own underwater explorations.

"All you hear is the sound of your regulator, and the bubbly sound it makes in the water," he said. "If you have anything in hand, and you lose your grip, it floats away. And the bottom line for me was always the shipwrecks.

"They're all so unique, so clean. The Emperor, at Canoe Rocks Reef by Isle Royale, is the epitome of all diving. The temperature is 40 degrees at the warmest, and I was good for about a half-hour before it left me chilled for the rest of the day. But when your body tells you you're done, you're done. I have memories, and my old Super 8 movies."

The club meets on the second Tuesday of every month at the Thomas Township Fire Station No. 2, at Dice and North Thomas. For more information, go to the Web site www.saginawunderwaterexplorers.org. ♦

Kids fought to have me on their spelling bee teams

A new survey confirms what I already knew — that most people can't spell for beans, but they think they can. You caught the misspellings in that last sentence, right?

Of course you did. They were obvious.

But how about my misspelling of misspelling? Catch that one?

If you didn't, you're like the people (76 percent) in the survey by the Spelling Society who described themselves as good spellers, but when it came to actually spelling 10 common words, that same 76 percent only averaged three correct answers.

The words they were asked to spell, in order of difficulty from easiest to hardest, were: friend, appeared, attempted, accidentally, separate, accommodation, definitely, millenium, liason and embarrassed.

You can spell those, right? Well, you certainly can if you noticed that I misspelled three of the words: separate, millennium and liaison.

If you didn't notice, don't feel bad. I'm sure you're good at other things. Gardening, perhaps. Or Sudoku.

The point is, not everyone can be a spelling

savant like me. Spelling has always been one of my gifts. Actually, my only gift. I have flat feet, week eyes and an inability to understand how to open most modern packaging.

I'm also not very good at swimming, home repair and understanding why my wife will ask me if I like her in a particular outfit then get mad at me if I say no. But I can flat spell.

By the way, you were aware that I misspelled the word "weak" three paragraphs back, right? Of course you were.

I've possessed this ability to spell as long as I can remember. My mother tells me that as a toddler, I would write words like "indubitably" and "onomatopoeia" on the wall with crayons.

By the way, indubitably doesn't have an "e" in it.

I'm sure you knew that.

In elementary school, kids fought to have me on their spelling bee team. Of course, at recess they would then fight to NOT have me on their kickball team, but that's another story.

In college, I was reknowned as a human dictionary. People would come from far and wide to consult me because, as we all know, if you don't know how to spell a word, how do you look it up?

By the way, I'm sure you noticed

that I spelled dictionary incorrectly. But did you notice that I added a "k" to renowned?

You really should be catching onto this game by now.

Finally, here at work, my nickname is "Spell-Check." We have computers with the spell-check function, sure, but often it's just easier to ask me, so people do.

You might think that I find this to be a bother. But, no. As Uncle Ben told Spider-Man, "With great power comes great responsibility."

That's why I've written this column, in fact. To help you. To test you. To nudge you further along the pathway to spelling greatness.

And if the "a" in responsibility jumped out at you, I'll consider the lesson delivered. ♦

Andrew Heller is a Flint Journal columnist.

ANDY HELLER

