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**Successful benefit held**

by Jen Genson and Mary Weimer  
 The benefit held for 10 month old Brooklyn Martell on March 14, 2009, raised \$2,000 the day of the event. The organizers and family members want to thank everyone who attended the scrapbook and craft benefit. Many thanks also to the vendors: Creative Memories, Close to My Heart, Creative Paper Creations, Lia Sophia, Scrapbook 101, K'doodle Cuts. Even though the day was a huge success, Brooklyn will still have many years of recovering. Monetary donations for Brooklyn can still be made at any Huntington or National City Bank. •

**Joy**

by Al Schneider  
 (From the North Ottawa County Council on Aging Monthly Highlights)  
 There is little happiness to be found aboard a troopship. In fact, some of the most miserable times of my life took place while squeezed amongst the pack of humanity aboard such a vessel. The designers had an ingenious talent for accounting for every cubic inch of space; however, these same designers had absolutely no concern for human comfort. Imagine it, if you can.

Five canvas bunks stacked from floor to ceiling, each about the length of a person. When occupied, we appeared as human sandwiches. Alongside was another stack just like it. There were more stacks ahead and behind so that you had a roomful of these things separated by narrow walkways. The Navy referred to these rooms as "compartments." We called them "holes." My bunk became my home. All of my belongings, including my backpack, rifle and steel helmet needed to be stored in my allotted space. My living space wasn't pretty, it wasn't pleasant, and above all, it wasn't comfortable. Ask anyone who has ever been transported on a troopship.

Typically, we left our bunks early each morning to enter a long line for what the Navy called breakfast. Then we were ordered on deck until our compartments were swabbed. Then we were told to get back to our holes while the decks were being hosed. The procedure resembled a cattle drive. After all that, we were directed back on deck for calisthenics or some other needless activity.

My longest stay on a troopship was for 45 days. During that time, we participated in several maneuvers and conducted practice beach landings. Whenever we did that, most of us would have preferred to remain on the beaches instead of going back to our ship.

My overseas tour included numerous voyages, each time on a troopship. These ventures soon became commonplace, but never enjoyable.

But there was that final trip from Guam to San Francisco that was less dreadful. The war was over now and our bunks seemed a bit softer, the chow lines shorter, the waves less bumpy, and the daily routines more tolerable. Still, it was a long trip and the ship's compartments continued to foster misery.

Then at long last, there was excitement on board. Land. We spotted land. The California coast was visible. Our homeland! As the ship drew closer, our excitement intensified. Until now, I hadn't realized how homesick I had been.

Moments later, there was a strange silence. To a man, we seemed awe stricken as we glided under the world's most beautiful bridge. There were tears. Battle-hardened Marines, I among them, were weeping with joy as we beheld the Golden Gate structure.

This was the land we had fought for and loved. On that day, let it be noted, there was joy on a troopship. •

**Fruitport Middle School to hold open house for serenity garden**

(Submitted by Fruitport Middle School)  
 The Fruitport Middle School students and staff have been working hard to create a serenity garden in the library courtyard. Flowers, pathways and landscaping in the garden are highlighted by handmade stepping stones, luminaries, garden candle holders, and various wildlife habitats. A garden dedication and name unveiling will be held on Tuesday, May 12 from 6 to 8 p.m. The event will include music by the FMS jazz band and vocalists with a special tribute to the late Gordon Mol. Refreshments will be provided. •

**Host families needed**

(Submitted by ASSE International Student Exchange Programs)  
 ASSE International Student Exchange is now accepting applications from host families for the 2009/2010 academic year. By hosting a foreign exchange student from Europe, Asia, North or South America, Australia, New Zealand, or South Africa, you provide a rewarding opportunity to a special teenager.

These personable and academically select exchange students are bright, curious, and anxious to learn about this country through living as part of a family, attending high school and sharing their own culture and language with their newly adopted host family. All students are well-screened, insured, speak English, and come with their own spending money. The students arrive from their home country shortly before school begins and return at the end of the school year.

Host families provide room and board and guidance for their new son or daughter while experiencing the joy of watching the child grow academically and culturally. Each exchange student expects to bear his or her share of the household responsibilities as well as be included in normal family activities. When sharing your home with a student from another culture, your lives are enriched forever by your new lifelong friendship.

Couples, single parents, and families without children are encouraged to apply. For additional information about hosting an ASSE exchange student, call Mary Henning, 616-581-5217. Also, please visit our website at www.asse.com for additional opportunities through ASSE! •



**March for Babies helps support Ashlynn Elizabeth and others**

by Mary Weimer  
 November 12, 2008 was a special day for April and Ryan Hamm of Muskegon. That is the day that their daughter, Ashlynn Elizabeth, was born.

The birth was clouded, however, by the fact that Ashlynn was born at just 22 weeks gestation. As a premature infant, Ashlynn faces an uphill struggle just to survive. She has had several surgeries, multiple blood transfusions, and many infections. She is a resident at the Helen DeVos Children's Hospital neonatal intensive care unit, which makes it hard for her parents as they have to work and travel to Grand Rapids to visit with Ashlynn.

Grandma Nancy Flaska of Fruitport says Ashlynn will be having more surgery, and is still fighting for her life. Even when she comes home, she will have to be closely watched for two or three years or more.

Ashlynn's parents, April and Ryan, have decided to support the March of Dimes by leading the "Team Ashlynn Elizabeth" in the annual fundraiser walk. The walk, held April 25, raises money for the March of Dimes.

The hospital maintains a blog for interested persons to follow Ashlynn's progress at www.caringbridge.org/visit/ashlynnelizabeth/mystory.

The Hamm's encourage everyone to support the research being done by the March of Dimes.

A benefit will be held for the Hamm family July 18th at Pomona Park from 4-9pm. There will be food, a live band and door prizes to raise money for their ongoing medical costs. •

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