

LANSING COMMUNITY NEWS

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"Not quite paradise, but a nice place to live."

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Lansing Quietly Celebrates A Traditional Thanksgiving

In the dark as Macy's floats prepared for their gala New York City parade and gridiron heroes got ready to compete with Bud Lite ads for the nation's attention, scores of folks in Lansing were quietly rising for their own personal rituals of Thanksgiving.

Up on Davis Road - not too far from the county line - lights were already showing in a converted horse barn when dawn broke under a moderately cold, relatively windless, clear sky. Inside, the chill was broken by steaming coffee cups, plates of sausage, bacon and eggs and the warm chatter of men who've been meeting on the fourth Thursday morning of November for more than 20 years for fellowship and to conduct their Thanksgiving day hunt.

At Myers Park, a few ducks in the otherwise empty Gallagher's Pond marina swam about as two bulkily-clad fishermen wrestled with their boat trailers wondering aloud whether the light coating of ice at the launching ramp would melt enough to permit easy re-loading by late mid-morning.

At a brand-new restaurant on East Shore Drive, the owner-chef sat by a picture window over-looking the back pond filling out his "prep" list in anticipation of the noon and evening diners. And, in Ludlowville, those who walk dogs in the park overlooking Salmon Creek's falls followed their usual routine.

"We'll harvest 6-15 deer a year from three principal 40-50 acre stands and five smaller woodlots," explained Jerry Haas of Lake Ridge. Everything is split between the fifteen or so hunters that make up the informal group. Fresh venison, venison jerky and several types of sausage are produced by local artisans. Nothing goes to waste.

So far this season, the group has harvested eight deer. "We're not filling many doe permits," said Haas. "It's amazing what this small territory can sustain."

The men agree that the deer herd in this area has been easing upwards over the last few years. Some of the men feel it's due to a decline in hunters, but others disagree and think that the availability and quality of food and forage has produced more and healthier deer than ever before.

"They eat better than cattle," explained poultryman Tom



A FULL CIRCLE OF FRIENDS -

Todd. The mechanical corn-pickers successfully harvest 99 percent of the standing field corn he and his son plant on approximately 500 acres. However, with planting densities ranging from 25-30,000 seeds per acre, the unharvested 1 percent leaves at least 125,000 ears of corn that the deer won't let go to waste. Of course, the deer also glean wheat, soybeans and forage crop residue that is available in abundance. And of course, there are other farms at which deer

Most of the conversation centers on the relationship between the local men and the deer who share Lake Ridge with them. One notes that the deer prefer clover's pink blossoms to alfalfa. Another speculates that the increase in high-protein soybean plantings is responsible for the healthy racks they've observed in recent years. Still another tells one of the high-schoolers (who have licenses but won't yet be allowed to fire) how the deer move right down to the lakeshore in search of acorns once the snow gets heavy on the ridge.

On the walls, better than 100 racks and taxidermied heads bear mute testimony to the hunters' 20 year heritage. Each has a tale and many a lesson. One set of spike-horn antlers (antlers without any points) was tilted at a particular angle that indicated its androgynous (bisexual) nature. Another, somewhat age-worn buck mounted on old-fashioned lead metal sheeting, recalled Todd's first hunting experience in 1945. And, though no one could recall ever having seen a bear on Lake Ridge, the mounted Coyote that they took four years ago left no doubt about its carnivorous appetite.

As breakfast concluded, the men chose a large woodlot up the road and outlined the group's strategy. The pre-hunting teens were assigned to older men.

For the first time since their arrival, the men examined their weapons to verify, once again, that the chambers were unloaded. Then off, in two pickups, they drove with the sound of the crunching snow fading to silence ... for a short time still.

Back on the lake, John Trojnar, of Dryden, eased his throttle back to a crawl as he entered the marina channel by the breakwater. The ice by the launching ramp was mostly gone by now and pulling the small boat out of the water onto the trailer was no problem at all.

"Do well?" I asked.

"Not bad," Trojnar replied. "Got a salmon, couple of browns and a rainbow."

"It's been a beautiful morning," I said.

"One of the last, maybe, of the season," he smiled.

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