

Locally  
Owned &  
Operated

# Tompkins Weekly

Your source for local news & events

Volume 9, No. 10 • January 5-11, 2015

FREE

**ALSO IN THIS ISSUE...**

Youth can benefit from sharing goals, and reflecting on personal growth .....page 2

Tax exemptions available to many county residents .....page 3

Create a better comfort zone in your home ..page 3

Letters, opinion .....page 4

Shakespeare Company prepares to present cycle of history plays .....page 6

Authors will present their works at Cornell Reading Series.....page 6



Drummer keeps the beat for jazz trio .....page 7

Twelfth Night event is all about telling tales .....page 7

## Sagan Still Inspires Followers

By Franklin Crawford

Utica resident Patrick Fish was an inquisitive young boy attending a strict Catholic school system. He questioned the dogma and orthodoxy. His teachers said his thoughts were simply “stupid” and, bascially, told him to obey.

In 1980, Fish and a fellow teenage heretic watched the entire 12-episode PBS series “Cosmos,” conceived by Carl Sagan, then-legendary Cornell professor of astronomy, and largely written by his wife, Ann Druyen. “Here was an adult asking the same questions we had,” says Fish, then 15. “And he had the answers—real answers—not fairytale dogma.”

“Cosmos” opened their minds to a world of wonder and introduced a sense of awe about the universe to the people on Sagan’s “Pale Blue Dot”—the title of one of his many books. The cover shot was taken as the unmanned Voyager 1, its mission complete, ventured out of contact with Earth.

Fish became one of many Sagan champions, charmed by the man, but lured by the science and Sagan’s impassioned pleas for sanity during President Ronald Reagan’s bellicose face-off

with Russia’s Mikhail Gorbachev in a potential apocalypse.

“It was like watching the Cuban Missile Crisis all over again, only in slow motion,” says Fish, 49. “Sagan might have been searching for life elsewhere. But his arguments against the insanity of nuclear proliferation had a big impact on the public and policy-makers here on earth.”

Fish followed Sagan, literally to his grave, which he finally visited in 2007 at Lakeview Cemetery in Ithaca. He has returned again and again to the site to do an inventory of items left there, or to tidy debris blasted out of a power mower that runs over the flat headstone. He’s pieced together entire NASA collector’s cards that got chipper-shredded. “The biggest archive of these objects is probably in the the compost dumped from those lawn mower bags,” he says.

At the gravesite in August this reporter spotted a black ball cap with a Nike-like double-swoosh, many marbles, large and small—some obviously looking like earth, others like Jupiter or Neptune and lots of local rocks and small glacial erratics. There was a Altoid box, glass stars,



Photo by Franklin Crawford

A collection of totems left at Carl Sagan’s headstone in Lakeview Cemetery by fans, admirers and followers of the late Cornell astronomer and astrophysicist.

large colored-paper clips in clusters. Visitors had left a small bolt, a five-cent coin, a polished rock with an indelible blue butterfly image on it and a Sagan quote, handwritten: “We are like butterflies who flutter for a day and think it is forever.” Empty Votive candles were here and there. “Fire can be seen from space,” Fish says, by way of explaining this was not a novena, but a tribute to Sagan’s SETI (Search for Extra Terrestrial Intelligence) project.

A three-day rain turned an Isaac Asimov tome into a moldering door-stop; the light blue cover of “Foundation’s Edge” by the biochemist-science-fiction-

writer; a weather-beaten NASA collector’s card. Gemstones, polished glass items, tiny shells ... Did these items have personal meaning for the visitor, or were they specific to the man?

On a return trip in December, exactly four months to the day, most of these these items, and many more, were joined by clusters of dried oak leaves. There were fresh deposits of blue polished glass and pale blue spheres to liven the withered grasses, glass stars, more rocks of all descriptions—lucky charms one and all. The nickel had been downsized to a penny.

Please turn to page 12

## Problem-Solving and Survival Skills

By Tompkins Weekly Staff

Boynton Middle School sixth-grade students in Vinnie Alcazaren and Keith Harrington’s classes completed a four-week study of pandemics and geography with a culminating project that brought the 40 students to 4-H Acres on Halloween to practice their survival skills with Primitive Pursuits staff members.

“Surviving the Zombie Apocalypse: A Study of Pandemics & Geography” was partially funded by a Red and Gold Grant from the Ithaca Public Education Initiative (IPEI).

“Our goal was to produce a large, problems-based learning unit that would engage the students while focusing on critical reading and math skills,” says Harrington, who had previously worked with Primitive Pursuits and thought they would be a natural partner for the subject matter. “I seek any way I can to incorporate popular culture (e.g. zombies) into class work. It’s a huge plus when you get a great amount of enthusiasm and engage-



Justin Sutera of Primitive Pursuits teaches Boynton Middle School students how to start one-match and friction fires.

ment while also teaching students to critically analyze a topic!” Alcazaren adds.

Primitive Pursuits’ Justin Sutera started the activities at 4-H Acres by gathering the students, many of them in costume, to review the survival “Rule of Three”: In any extreme situation you cannot survive for more than three minutes without air, three hours without shelter, three days without water, three weeks without food. Three activity stations followed in which students

showcased their survival skills, highlighting their importance in the event of a pandemic, and playfully tying them to surviving in a world full of zombies.

Students practiced making one-match fires and friction fires; building waterproof shelters; and hunting using throwing sticks and an atlatl, a spear-throwing tool used by Native Americans. Primitive Pursuits staff members reminded students at each station that these skills would be helpful in the

event of a zombie apocalypse, with fire needed for warmth, cooking, and purifying water; hunting skills needed for food; and shelter needed for protection from both the elements and zombie predators.

“It was really rewarding to see our kids enjoy being outdoors and learning different wilderness survival skills from Primitive Pursuits, and to see them apply their learning to something that goes beyond the classroom,” Alcazaren says.

To prepare for the trip, representatives from Primitive Pursuits came to Boynton to discuss survival skills based on the geography, geology, flora and fauna of the Finger Lakes region and greater New York. Earlier in the four-week unit, students researched a case study of the influenza pandemic in 1918 and learned about the CDC and virulent diseases.

Graphs, charts, and data tables related to the spread of disease were created and analyzed to make predictions about future out-

Please turn to page 12

# Sagan

Continued from page 1

"Coins, even small ones, don't last long," says Fish. "I know someone who trekked to the site all the way from Chile and deposited a coin. That's long gone." Fish served as de facto cell phone guide, describing various items. He calls himself a Sagan admirer, but he's also part of an invisible global watch group for all things Sagan.

The ball cap was gone, but Fish had my computer photo and identified it from August: SpaceX, a private space explorations company based in California. "And the paper clips you see there, especially if they are multicolored, are symbols of stars or atoms," Fish says. "A lot of them fall apart, especially after maintenance has gone over the area with a mower."

But what about the Altoids box? "When I studied that closer I saw it was a homemade bong, with two holes poked in it and another for a mouthpiece" says Fish. "Sagan was a proponent of marijuana and this may be a symbol of his commitment to its legalization." Perhaps so. Beside the case is a blue Bic lighter.

The Asimov book, Fish conjectures, was left by someone who knew the writer's affection for Sagan's "The Cosmic Connection." After reading "Pale Blue Dot," Asimov wrote, "It was entirely too obvious ... that you are smarter than I am ..." The polished rock and Sagan quote also were there.

Fish returned to the site on Dec. 20 to mark the 18th anniversary of Sagan's death. He put a few things back in place, met some others who had come on a pilgrimage to the site at Lakeview Cemetery and left.

There are always stories of meeting others like himself who found a way into a "Cosmos" filled with wonder, as opposed to a bifurcated heaven/hell fairyland overseen by a punitive demiurge that treats them like idiots for asking the same innocent questions that lead to major breakthroughs in human understanding of our place in the scheme of things.

## County

Continued from page 2

applications (including any new agricultural building exemptions, business improvement exemptions and capital improvements to residential properties—City of Ithaca/Town of Dryden only) must be filed by March 1 as well.

The agricultural land exemption application must be filed by April 1. For the 2014 Assessment Roll, New York State finally offered the ability for an applicant who owns multiple parcels to file a single exemption application. An attempt was made to group an owner's parcels on the renewal application.

For those property owners who had their Basic STAR exemption removed as they made over \$500,000 in 2012, if their 2013 income was under \$500,000, they must re-file a new Basic STAR exemption application by March 1.

A list of exemptions administered in Tompkins County can be found at [www.tompkinscountyny.gov/assessment](http://www.tompkinscountyny.gov/assessment) or by calling (607) 274-5517.

## Survival

Continued from page 1

breaks and to reflect on historical outbreaks. Students read several

excerpts and short stories related to zombies and survival in order to build background knowledge, working vocabulary, and engagement.

Boynton Principal Joseph Dhara notes that all sixth-grade students are enrolled in enrichment classes that "include tailoring the course work to the students' interests and at the same time addressing academic skills. The teachers work year round to help the students get ready for middle school and beyond."

IPEI Red and Gold Grants provide one-time funding for projects that strengthen and enrich the Ithaca City School District (ICSD) curriculum, have a positive impact on students and actively engage students. IPEI is a not-for-profit organization that connects the ICSD and the community through collaboration, engagement, gifts and grants. For more information, see [www.ipei.org](http://www.ipei.org) or contact 256-IPEI (4734) or [ipei@ipei.org](mailto:ipei@ipei.org).

## Reading

Continued from page 6

released "See You in Paradise" and additional short fiction and book reviews found in many prominent publications and anthologies. Lennon's story "The Rememberer" inspired the CBS detective series "Unforgettable." Along with Lennon, Valzhyna Mort will read from her collections, "Factory of Tears" and "Collected Body." Praised as a "risen star of the international poetry world" (Irish Times), Mort received the 2008 Burda Prize for Eastern European authors, the 2009 Lannan Foundation Literary Fellowship, and the 2010 Bess Hokin Prize from

Poetry Magazine.

The series concludes on April 23 with poet and critic Stephen Yenser, Distinguished Professor of English and Director of Creative Writing at UCLA. Yenser's volumes of poems are "Blue Guide," "The Fire in All Things," which received the Walt Whitman Award from the Academy of American Poets, and the forthcoming "Stone Fruit." Other awards include the B. F. Connors Prize from the Paris Review, three appearances in the Best American Poetry series and Fulbright Fellowships to France and Greece. The author of three critical books, Yenser is also the co-editor of five books by James Merrill, and is currently at work on Merrill's Selected Letters.

All events are free and open to the public. Unless otherwise noted, events take place on Thursdays at 4:30 p.m. in Hollis E. Cornell Auditorium of Goldwin Smith Hall.

For more information, visit [www.arts.cornell.edu/english/creative/readings](http://www.arts.cornell.edu/english/creative/readings).

## Voter Registration

Friday, Jan. 16, is the last day for a new voter to postmark a registration form to be eligible to vote in the Feb. 10 special election (9th county legislative district). Friday, Jan. 30, is the last day for a new voter to register in person at the Board of Elections for the special election.

Sample ballots are available and can be viewed at [www.votetompkins.com](http://www.votetompkins.com). Absentee ballots are available now and the absentee application can be printed from the website, or you can stop by the Board of Elections office to apply in person.

The Board of Elections is located at 128 E. Buffalo St. in Ithaca.

The advertisement features a green background with a large red tomato with a white star on its side. To the right of the tomato, the word "GreenStar" is written in a large, white, sans-serif font. Below "GreenStar", the word "Members" is written in a large, black, handwritten-style font. In the top right corner, there is a circular logo with the word "CO-OP" inside. At the bottom, a black horizontal bar contains the text "U-Pick 10% off" in white, with a smaller version of the tomato with a star to the right of the percentage. Below this bar, the text "You pick what day", "You want to receive", and "Your monthly 10% discount" is written in a black, handwritten-style font.