

Interlochen Public Radio
Issues/Program narrative – 2023, Q4 (October, November, December)

By Ed Ronco, news director

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In the final quarter of 2023, Interlochen Public Radio grew its environmental reporting, dove into the issue of childcare accessibility and expanded its look at the arts.

All of the stories mentioned were carried on IPR News Radio, with many also appearing on Classical IPR during local news cutaways.

Below, find a summary of our coverage grouped by topic. If you have questions, please contact us at ipr@interlochen.org, with the subject line “Attn. News Director.”

Arts, Entertainment and Recreation

Two recurring features helped expand our coverage of the arts this quarter. The first five installments of a series called “Fresh Coast Creatives” took us into the studios and lives of artists around northern Michigan — a trumpet player, a writer, a muralist, a painter, and a musician. The series continues in Q1 of 2024 with five more installments.

We also continued our work with arts contributor Joe Beyer, who brought us looks at a culture journal and a holiday extravaganza live on stage in Leland.

Plus, we traveled to Manistee for the dedication of a statue honoring actor James Earl Jones, and got a preview of the 2024 National Writers Series.

Law and Justice

A hair salon in Traverse City, charged with discrimination for excluding trans clientele. Child abuse charges against a former child advocate. Reactions from local judges on changes to Michigan’s juvenile justice laws. And whether former President Donald Trump can appear on the state’s primary ballot.

Those were just some of the law and justice stories making headlines in Q4.

Environment and Agriculture

Our newsroom has a heavy focus on environmental coverage, including climate change, natural resources and agriculture.

A bumper crop of apples was a double-edged sword for farmers who had plenty to sell but also a lot of fruit (and therefore money) left on the tree with nowhere to go. The USDA eventually provided some help, buying a lot of the surplus.

Michigan's tribes received funding for recycling initiatives and weighed in on key environmental issues, including fishing rights and the Line 5 tunnel proposal.

We heard about Michigan's ambitious plans for clean energy by the year 2040, students searching for microplastics in a local river and invasive species.

And our partnership with Grist, which added a climate reporter to our newsroom in the previous quarter, bore fruit too, through stories about Line 5, climate resilience, Line 5, solar panels and even how climate change can impact northern Michigan's beautiful (and lucrative) fall colors.

Medicine and Health

Advocates of a local hospice learned that the facility would stay open, after a similar one closed. Nurses pushed back on a plan by a major hospital to consolidate some care. There was an increase in HIV cases and a decrease in available doses of the COVID vaccine. And an assist from our partners at Michigan Public brought a story about the complications of concussions and teen suicide rates.

Business and Economy

IPR's Tyler Thompson published and aired a five-part series on childcare, and how northern Michigan doesn't have enough of it. The series went deep on a number of economic issues, from worker retention to how childcare centers themselves are run.

We also launched a new effort to report on the region's housing crisis, with a story about how year-round workers are feeling the pressure of climbing rental prices. There will be more stories like this to come in 2024.

Politics and Government

We continue to receive routine and excellent coverage from the Michigan Public Radio Network's two correspondents in Lansing. That includes the end of the 2023 session for the Michigan Legislature, interviews with leaders on both sides of the aisle, and the enactment of the Reproductive Health Act.

Within our own newsroom, we covered a brief run for Speaker of the House from local U.S. Rep. Jack Bergman, a stalemate on what to do with vacant land in Charlevoix, anger from Muslim Michigan voters over President Biden's support of Israel's war in Gaza, and the fears of a U of M student whose cousins were fighting for Israel.

Race, Identity and Culture

This quarter, we heard about a Detroit memorial to a woman killed in Selma, Alabama, in 1965. And Michigan put forward efforts to study the impacts of Native American board schools.

There's room to grow in this category, and we hope 2024 brings that growth.