

Interlochen Public Radio
Issues/Program narrative — 2022, Q4 (October, November, December)

By Ed Ronco, news director

Jan. 4, 2023

A midterm election kept us busy this quarter. So did criminal proceedings against suspects in the plot to kidnap Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, debates over environmental policy, and a busy arts scene in Traverse City and the surrounding region.

The IPR newsroom strives for coverage that spreads across a wide variety of subject matters, and in a way that reflects the concerns and daily life of our community. Below are some highlights from our coverage for the last three months (October through December).

Arts, entertainment and recreation

We heard from luminaries in the arts world, including interviews with composer Andrew Dost, photographer Pete Souza, singer/songwriter Margo Price, and musicians BJ Leiderman and Kenny White. We also spoke with local authors Jacob Wheeler and Johnathan Rand about their works, visited a public art installation in Manistee, went hiking through the woods at an art park in Thompsonville, and spent an evening under the stars with a night sky photographer. Plus, our Points North podcast took us to the North Country Trail, for a powerful story of what it takes to complete all 4,800 miles of hiking.

Law and justice

As it often does, our coverage in this category included stories from Michigan Radio and other statewide partners. We aired stories about a conviction and sentencing for some of those accused in the plot to kidnap Michigan's governor. The Charlevoix police chief retired before being fired because of harassment complaints. And Cheboygan County's sheriff retired under happier circumstances — capping a decades-long career spent in his hometown. Federal officials also served a subpoena on Michigan's Secretary of State's office as they investigate interference in the 2020 presidential election.

Environment and agriculture

Long a focal point for our newsroom, in Q4 we aired stories about commercial fishing rights in the Great Lakes, continued recovery from a deadly tornado in Gaylord, new efforts by the state to track the deer and elk populations, efforts to clean up plastic from Traverse City beaches, innovative ideas for addressing invasive mussels in the Great Lakes, and the long-simmering debate over Traverse City's FishPass project. We also heard about the possibility of wind energy in the Great Lakes, and how organizers of a snowmobile festival feel about big winter storms that came through in December.

Medicine and health

Women in Petoskey (and other locations across the state and country) marched in October for their reproductive rights, following the striking down of Roe v. Wade this

past summer. We covered the Petoskey march. We also focused a lot on resources for youth who need help, especially inpatient mental healthcare.

Business and economy

Our stories here ran the gamut from light features about a new tourist attraction that relied on a family-owned business for its lumber, to a serious look at tornado recovery six months after Gaylord was hit by a deadly EF-3 twister, to an analysis of whether money from vacation rentals could be used to fund affordable housing. The crisis surrounding housing in our region was one of the top stories of 2022 and likely will be in 2023 as well. So in late October, we also broadcast the entire keynote speech at the Northwest Michigan Housing summit, paired with an interview from Yarrow Brown, a prominent local housing advocate.

Politics and government

No surprise that we had a ton of coverage here, in the fall of an election year. That included a four-part series on major issues facing voters in November: Access to healthcare, housing, legalized marijuana sales, and the controversial Line 5 tunnel project. We also had comprehensive local election coverage, including cutaways from NPR special coverage to give local updates on Election Night, and newscasts and program cutaways in *Morning Edition* the following day with local results and reactions.

IPR was a co-sponsor of the annual Cherry Pie Debates, presented by the local Leelanau Enterprise. On air we did a 4-minute interview advancing the event, and another one the next morning highlighting some of the key moments. We posted the debate in its entirety on our website.

Beyond the election, we covered a proposal by Upper Peninsula hunters to have more control over how natural resources are regulated, the outgoing legislature's inability to pass a half-billion-dollar spending plan, promises from the federal government to stimulate battery production for electric vehicles in Michigan, and more.

We were also fortunate to continue airing regular and excellent coverage of the state capital from our Michigan Public Radio Network correspondents there: Rick Pluta and Colin Jackson. They are regular parts of our newscasts.

Race, identity and culture

Indigenous Peoples' Day fell within this quarter, and we covered it before and after. We also aired a story by Briana Rice of Michigan Radio looking at the Birdwood Wall in Detroit — built in 1941 to separate a white neighborhood from a Black one. The wall received a historical marker this year.

I'd like us to continue to grow this aspect of our reporting, and incorporate far more perspectives and stories about race, identity and culture, in Q1 of 2023.