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Official Newsletter of Minnesota Mensa

Volume LX

Number 6

March 2024



Earl Goodcat

Photo by Wanda Shelton

Second Friday Online — Bird Brains!
Science Fiction and Fantasy SIG – Page 19

M · E · N · S · A · G · E · N · D · A Staff

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★★ The deadline for the April 2024 issue is March 5 ★★

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I nformation

Mensagenda is the official publication of Minnesota Mensa, Local Group #550 of American Mensa, Ltd., which serves the state of Minnesota and certain areas of Wisconsin.

Mensagenda is published to provide members with a schedule of events and activities of the local group. It may also contain organizational and administrative information, and any other material selected for publication by the editor. Opinions expressed in *Mensagenda* are those of the individually named contributors. No material herein may be reprinted without permission of the editor, except by other Mensa publications, provided that *Mensagenda* is credited.

Annual subscription for members of Minnesota Mensa is included in national membership dues. All other subscriptions \$9.00 per year.

Now is the time to continue your Mensa experience as the 2023–2024 membership year ends. Renewals are still at the \$79 one-year rate we've had since 2017 but

appear likely to increase starting in 2025. Jon Gruebele discussed the likely cost increase in his articles in the January and February issues of *Mensagenda*.

Jon points to the challenge of finding the equilibrium between dues price and membership. If dues are too low, we won't get enough income to service our members' needs, which is our current situation. If dues are too high, we may accelerate member loss. Two key issues are which portion of our member demographics it impacts the most and the perception of value.

A quarter of Minnesota Mensa members purchased a lifetime membership. Those members tend to be in our largest demographics. I discussed our membership age demographics and challenges in my article in January last year. It is still available at <https://www.mnmensa.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/mnsbk59-04.pdf>. Members who are middle-aged and older are more likely to maintain their memberships, even at higher rates. The more significant risk is with the younger members who are not yet middle-aged. Those younger members are Mensa's future organizers, officers, and leaders. What will they think about higher dues? I need more information to offer an opinion about the impact of the price increase.

Even at \$107 per year, that is still only \$8.92 each month. People can spend that much on a large cup of coffee and treat at a coffee shop. Proposing such an increase four years ago would have produced a much different reaction than today. A fast food meal is now more than \$9. Streaming services, movie theaters, concerts, sporting events, and so on all cost more today. I discussed the value equation in more detail in my article of March last year. Find the issue at <https://www.mnmensa.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/mnsbk59-06.pdf>. We'll see how well Mensa promotes the value of your membership dollars.

Minnesota Mensa will benefit from an increase in the per-member provision provided by American Mensa. The current amount per member is just 85 cents per month or \$10.20 per year. An explanation of our finances is outside the scope of this article. Briefly, printing and mailing *Mensagenda* to half our members takes most of our income. With the cost savings by switching printers and dropping the periodical permit preparation costs, we are no longer financially in the red. We still don't have much left after basic expenses, so any increase in our portion of member dues is welcome. The Board is discussing our next budget and what we should spend to support events that will attract more member participation.

There are projects I am waiting for American Mensa to spend money on to improve infrastructure, services, and responsiveness to members. The old adage is that you must spend money to make money. Marketing and great member

The LocSec's Podium

Kevin Borchers

experiences take money, but pay back with new members and better long-term retention.

What should you do right now? Renew for three or five years, and consider a lifetime membership. I personally addressed the certainty of my membership fee going up over time and purchased the lifetime membership in 2021. I joined Mensa 20 years before that, renewing every year. My lifetime amount would have equaled about 15 years if the amount never increased. It made sense since I already passed 20 years and expected to continue every year until I die. It made sense even before that, but I wasn't paying enough attention, and the up-front cost seemed daunting. Once I paid attention, I computed the numbers and saved time and money instead of annual renewal. Plus, the breakeven point will be much sooner with increases in dues, less than 10 years now, instead of 15.

Reach me by email to locsec@mnmensa.org or by phone at (612) 819-8088.

A

merican Mensa's fiscal year runs April 1 through March 31, because reasons. This means many of our memberships will

expire at the end of March. If you're in that situation, you get to decide whether to lapse, renew, or potentially purchase a discounted three-year, five-year, or lifetime membership.

The good news is that even if it passes, the dues increase proposal on the agenda for the March board of directors (AMC) meeting won't go into effect until April 1. Should dues increase to \$107, you can still renew at the current \$79 annual rate through March 31. That equates to just \$6.58 a month.

Last fiscal year, 88.2% of members renewed. Lapsed member surveys cite issues including a challenging financial situation; not enough value; and a lack of local, regional, or national activities of interest.

Personally, I'm a huge fan of our events—both in-person and virtual. I attended Mind Games® and 13 other RGs and AGs last year. I had a ball at every one. Post-pandemic, new virtual events have abounded. Check our national events calendar (<https://www.us.mensa.org/attend/calendar/>) for upcoming online sessions. If you can't find something you like, consider hosting something you do like!

Some people are located far away from events, have transportation issues, or are experiencing financial challenges. They may find the monthly dinner at the Olive Garden mundane—despite the unlimited breadsticks. Conversely, some find that just reading the *Bulletin* and local group newsletters is enough. I'm delighted we have these members too, although I wish I could meet them in person someday.

Of our first-year members, 74.0% also renewed. That's pretty good, but this lower renewal rate implies some new members don't find as much value as the

Jon's Journal

Decisions, Decisions

Jon Gruebele

rest of us. Maybe—like me—they mistakenly thought a Mensa membership would help their job prospects. Maybe they were looking for deep conversations about existentialism, dark matter, or national fiscal policy—and instead found us pontificating about the latest board games. I suspect many simply didn't attend any events or get involved by volunteering. Surveys show that members who do that are much happier with their membership.

We all have our own reasons for being members. I bought a life membership back when dues were \$45. That was one of my better financial decisions, and I've had the joy of belonging ever since. Even if I had to pay the equivalent of \$6.58 a month, I'd still consider it a bargain.

Finally, please remember that you must renew by March 31 to vote in our upcoming national election. Those of us who are volunteering to serve you on the AMC would appreciate your considering the candidates and casting your vote. There are multiple contested positions, and the winners will lead the organization over the next three years.

Feedback? Please contact me at rvc4@us.mensa.org or via phone/text at (309) 693-1359. Region 4's Facebook group is: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/americanmensaregion4>.

March First Friday

Don Nemitz

February's First Friday went a bit south because the room we usually use had been double-booked, and we had to sit out in the main dining room. It was OK, just a

bit louder than we usually like. Still we had some very good discussions and the food was great, as usual. We welcomed a curious potential new member, and a Mensan attending her first First Friday.

First Friday for March 1 will be at the Fred Babcock VFW Post 5555. Their address is 6715 Lake Shore Dr. S. in Richfield. We will have a private room for us. Their menu includes soups, salads, sandwiches, and dinners. Their website is <https://www.facebook.com/vfw5555/>, but they do not post a menu.

Parking in their front lot is extremely limited, but there is additional parking in the rear with an access door and a short flight of steps down. There is some limited street parking near the front, and there is parking available in a park across the street.

Registration will be set up before 6 p.m. for people who plan to come for the First Friday Feast. First Friday socializing, for those not coming for dinner, begins at 8 p.m. It's all one price, \$5 for members, \$7 for guests. We'll be in the same area all evening. If you plan to come for dinner, please RSVP to fffeast@mnmensa.org so we can give them an approximate number.

Please add this event to your monthly calendars. If you want a reminder about a week before the Friday, just email fffeast@mnmensa.org and I'll add you in.

Candidate Statements

Following are the statements submitted by all candidates in the 2020 Minnesota Mensa election of officers. The statements have not been edited.

LocSec:

Kevin Borchers

Progress and learning mark Minnesota Mensa's journey during the past two years. We made progress on the 2021–2026 Strategic Plan. We learned from efforts to engage members and the impact of the pandemic and social shifts in how we interact. Watching members, especially new and younger ones, participate in events builds hope for the future of Minnesota Mensa.

Since I took office in April 2022, we launched the first iteration of a renovated public website, improved *Mensagenda* delivery while reducing costs, and restarted proctored testing after building a new pool of proctors from scratch. The People Team addresses volunteerism and recognition, and the Events Team is creating a system for bringing new and fascinating events.

We still have much work to do on our Strategic Plan. I ask for your vote because I want to continue to lead Minnesota Mensa's efforts to renovate our infrastructure, revitalize our engagement, and grow our membership.

Together with active board members, appointed officers, and our great volunteers, we can build a vibrant community with excellent member experiences.

First Vice Secretary

Bria Knorr

I am seeking a third term as First Vice Secretary. I am interested in continuing the work we have started as a board to expand and grow interest and engagement in Mensa and our activities.

I believe my background working in leadership roles within the business and technology sectors as well as volunteer experience with organizations like TechnovationMN, Habitat for Humanity, and People to People, as well as my growing experience on the Mensa board, will help me serve well in this position. Mensa has given me the opportunity to meet kind and amazing people and be part of a vibrant organization. I look forward to continuing to serve this incredible community of intelligence.

Candidate Statements*

Second Vice-Secretary:

Andrew C. Coyne

Greetings Mensa members! I’m excited to have the opportunity to join the ballot for our Minnesota chapter, for the Second Vice-Secretary role.

If elected, my goals would include:

1. Supporting thought-provoking events.
2. Helping build engagement across our state.
3. Celebrating the achievements of our members and their families.

I’m a newer member of Mensa, living in Rochester. After the lockdowns of the COVID-19 pandemic I’m particularly interested in how we build community with fellow members everywhere, for a vibrant exchange of ideas, and just for fun! I’m eager to contribute to the growth and success of our regional Mensa organization. Together, let’s continue to celebrate the role of intellect in society, building the camaraderie that defines Mensa. Thank you for considering my candidacy and the possibility of serving you and our dynamic Mensa community!

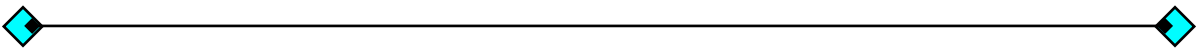
Second Vice-Secretary:

Michelle Peterick

I am formally submitting my name for the position of second vice secretary. The last two years have been an energizing experience, and we have taken Minnesota Mensa to new heights and explored fresh territory.

I look forward to being your second vice sectary again.

**Listed alphabetically*



Snow or no snow, spring your clocks ahead to our next Sharp Women gathering. If you knit, crochet, spin, or do any form of fiber art, or want to start, please join us to converse and work on your own needlecraft project. Don’t let the group name fool you, regardless of gender, everyone is welcome. We will meet this month via Zoom on Sunday, March 10, from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. Contact SIG coordinator Arleen Roberts at (612) 720-8847 or family@danclan.com for information on how to join us.

Smart Women SIG
Arleen Roberts


Marx Brotherhood SIG

Kenneth Kuller

The Marx Brothers began their careers as a children's singing act in vaudeville, where their uncle Albert Schönberg performed as Al Shean of "Gallagher and

Shean." In 1907, Groucho, Gummo, and Mabel O'Donnell performed together as "The Three Nightingales." Harpo became the fourth Nightingale in 1908, and by 1910 the group briefly expanded to include their mother Minnie and their Aunt Hannah. The brothers graduated to Broadway where they quickly began filling theaters to capacity. Soon they were in movies, and on the television and radio. Their entertaining, comic style is characterized by a fast pace, witty dialogue, absurd situations, and physical comedy.

This month I had intended to present television interviews from *Person to Person* and the *Today* show, along with personal appearances on *I've Got A Secret* and *Hollywood Palace*. However, these recordings feel more informational and less entertaining than I had hoped for. I have decided instead that our March meeting will be the movie *Copacabana* (1947) in which Groucho Marx plays a starring role. Talent agent Lionel Devereaux (Groucho) and Carmen Novarro (Carmen Miranda) are an acting team who are both unemployed and in love with each other. Pretending to be Carmen's agent, Groucho books her at the dazzling Copacabana Club posing as a Brazilian singer/dancer. When the impressed owner asks Groucho to provide more acts, Groucho convinces Carmen to disguise herself as a French singer so that she can draw a second salary. Changing back and forth between performances wears on Carmen and leads to heated words. When one of the acts disappears, management becomes suspicious and so do the police.

Copacabana is the first movie in which Groucho appears with a real mustache instead of a painted-on one.

In April we will screen the movie *Room Service* (1938). Watch for our SIG announcement in next month's *Mensagenda* for further details.

The Marx Brotherhood SIG will meet March 9 at 2 p.m. RSVP (required) for location. Contact: Ken Kuller at kenneth.kuller@gmail.com or at (952) 465-2134.

The cover cat is Earl Goodcat.

There is no cuter cover cat.

Earl Goodcat and his younger pal Duke were a bonded pair that

I adopted a couple of weeks before the

pandemic lockdown. St. Paul Animal Control rescued them from a house of too many cats, and Pet Haven found a family to foster them for six weeks before I adopted them. Earl was a smart, curious, energetic and active cat though he arrived with some health problems. Last summer his health declined. He was diagnosed with feline immunodeficiency virus and died in August at age five. He is missed by Duke, me, and the Ukrainian mother and daughter who live with me.


About the Cover

Wanda Shelton

This month GenY will be going to The Battleground Café for a game day. Battleground Café has a selection of games on hand and

GenY SIG
Shannon Richmond

large tables for playing board games in a group. They also have a full menu of food and drinks available while you play. This event is planned for Saturday, March 16, at 1 p.m. The Battleground Café is located at 2008 Co. Rd. E. East in White Bear Lake. For more information visit: <https://www.thebattlegroundcafe.com/>. Please contact Shannon to RSVP and for details at srichmond@live.com or (651) 336-0096.

For other ways to connect with Mensa, join the Facebook group for National GenY SIG: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/GenYMs/?ref=share> or the Minnesota GenY group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/MensaGenYMN/?ref=share>.



Games SIG
Wanda Shelton

Let's make another attempt to gather for games at my house. We'll meet Saturday, March 9, from 1 to 5 p.m. If we are lucky,

or living right, or the planets are properly aligned, etc., the event will not be cancelled due to weather or illness or scheduling conflicts. I plan to limit the number of participants so please check with me the day before or the morning of the event to see if you made the cut and the event is on. I'm also putting 5 o'clock as the end time because that is as much playtime as I can enjoy these days. Bring a snack to share if you wish, and as always, bring your own non-alcoholic beverage.

Contact Wanda Shelton, (651) 487-7197 or jouwan2420@gmail.com.

Dr. Deborah Ruf Honored

Teresa Manzella



Dr. Deborah Ruf is a former Mensa National Gifted Youth Program Coordinator, a long-time fixture in the the gifted universe—and well-known to many Minnesota families and their gifted children.

On Jan. 28, the Minnesota Educators of the Gifted and Talented presented Ruf with its 2023 *Friend of the Gifted* award. The occasion was part of the festivities to kick off MEGT's annual Midwinter Conference.

Because I was attending the conference as a presenter, I had the opportunity to be in the room when Ruf received her award. It was a pleasure to see a respected colleague, with whom I'd worked on many local and national Mensa projects, recognized for her significant contributions to the field of gifted education. We are fortunate to have such a resource here in Minnesota. Congratulations, Deborah!

Ruf is the author of the award-winning book, *5 Levels of Gifted*, as well as the 2023 follow-up book, *The 5 Levels of Gifted Children Grown Up*. For more than 40 years, she has served as a keynote speaker and conference presenter, and she is the author of over a dozen peer-reviewed journal articles and hundreds of newsletter articles.

My goodness, we're into March already!

First; I apologize that we had technical problems

with our talk about *Becoming* by Michelle Obama. I have switched carriers.

The book we are exploring for March is *Turn the Ship Around*, a true story of turning followers into leaders. This book is available on Kindle, Barnes and Noble, Amazon, and Great River Regional Library. The ISBN is 978-1-101-62369-5. The Author is L. David Marquet.

When: Wednesday, March 27, from 7 to 9 p.m.

Where: Online via Zoom at <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/81271471236?pwd=R3l2WTh0UTY5R0l2Ly9pOFNGd3M2UT09>. Meeting ID: 812 7147 1236, passcode: 763377. Call (312) 626-6799 for phone-only or audio by phone and enter the meeting ID and passcode.

Audience: All members who would like to get together and talk about exciting books.

Contact Michelle Peterick at peterick.michelle@aol.com or (320) 402-9876.

Talking About Books

Michelle Peterick

Board Meeting Online, March 5, 7 p.m. Please contact LocSec Kevin Borchers by email to locsec@mnmensa.org or by phone at (612) 819-8088 for details.

First Friday Feast March 1, 6 p.m., at the Fred Babcock VFW Post 5555 in Richfield. Please RSVP for the Feast before Friday morning. Admission fee is \$5 for members, \$7 for non-members (covers both Friday events). Contact: don.nemitz@comcast.net. See the article on page 5.

First Friday March 1, 8 p.m., at the Fred Babcock VFW Post 5555 in Richfield. Admission fee \$5 for members, \$7 for non-members (covers both Friday events). Non-members welcome (at both events). Contact: don.nemitz@comcast.net. See the article on page 5.

Games SIG Saturday, March 9, 1 to 5 p.m. Attendance is limited. Contact: Wanda Shelton at jouwan2420@gmail.com. or (651) 487-7197. See the article on page 9.

GenX SIG Sunday, March 10, 7 to 9 p.m. I will be hosting our March meeting online via Zoom. The link is <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89431776959?pwd=S1krMFBLL0thVi9ha1JWtU5KdDdTZz09>. The Zoom ID is 894 3177 6959 and the passcode is 241512.

March Dinner: Friday, March 15, 6 p.m., at Khan's Mongolian Barbecue in Roseville. Contact: Lisa G. Sanders at Lisa.g.sanders.bucklin@gmail.com. See the article on page 16.

GenY SIG Saturday, March 16, 1 p.m. Game Day at Battleground Café in White Bear Lake. Contact: Shannon at srichmond@live.com or (651) 336-0096. See the article on page 9.

Gifted Youth Program Feb. 29, 7 p.m. Webinar with American Mensa's national Gifted Youth Programs Manager, Molly Bundschuh. (This event is rescheduled from Feb. 22.)

March 16, 1 to 3 p.m. InnerActive PlayGround in Mounds View. Contact: Angela Gotz at giftedyouth@mnmensa.org. See the article on page 15.

Last Thursday Break March 28, 10 a.m. Coffee break time. Stop by for a chat. Contact: Wanda Shelton, jouwan2420@gmail.com. or (651) 487-7197. See the article on page 16.

LGBT SIG Saturday, March 2. Potluck Dinner. Contact: Jerry at (763) 546-1457.

Marx Brotherhood SIG March 9, 2 p.m., to watch *Copacabana* (1947). RSVP (required) for location. Contact: Ken Kuller at kenneth.kuller@gmail.com or by phone at (952) 465-2134. See the article on page 8.

Reciphiles SIG Saturday, March 23, 6 p.m., at the home of Karen Bodin at 501 Theodore Wirth Pkwy. in Golden Valley. Our theme this month is Classic Recipes with a Twist. Contact: Mary Olson Coleman, text to (612) 804-9489 or email at molsoncoleman@yahoo.com.

(continued on page 14)

**April Mensagenda Calendar Deadline:
Tuesday, March 5**

March 2024

See pages 11 and 14 for details

Send calendar items to: mensagenda@mnmensa.org.

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
25 Science Fiction & Fantasy SIG 1 p.m. Theodore Talks Online 2:30 & 3:30 p.m.	26	27	28	29 Last Thursday Break Online 10 a.m. Gifted Youth Program Online 7 p.m. Webinar	1 First Friday Feast 6 p.m. First Friday 8 p.m.	2
3 Science Fiction & Fantasy SIG Movie Outing TBD	4	5 Board Meeting Online 7 p.m. April 2024 <i>Mensagenda</i> deadline	6	7	8 Second Friday Online 7 to 9 p.m. Topic: Bird Brains!	9 Games SIG 1-5 p.m. Marx Brothers SIG 2 p.m.
10 Sharp Women SIG Online 1:30 p.m. GenX SIG Online 7 to 9 p.m.	11	12	13	14	15 GenX dinner 6 p.m. Khan's Mongolian Barbecue, Roseville	16 Gifted Youth Program 1 to 3 p.m, InnerActive Playground GenY SIG 1 p.m. Game Day
17	18	19	20	21	22	23 Reciphiles SIG 6 p.m.
24 Science Fiction & Fantasy SIG 1 p.m. Theodore Talks Online 2:30 p.m.	25	26	27 Talking About Books Online 7 to 9 p.m.	28 Last Thursday Break Online 10 a.m.	29	30
31	1	2 Board Meeting Online 7 p.m.	3	4	5 First Friday Feast 6 p.m. First Friday 8 p.m.	6

Science Fiction and Fantasy SIG Sunday, March 3, time TBD. Movie outing to *Dune: Part Two*.

Sunday, March 24, 1 p.m. Focused discussion about the video “Who Put the ‘Punk’ in Steampunk? The Roots and Evolution of Steampunk.” Find out what people are reading and watching and enjoy an open discussion in the second hour. In-person and online at <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/89624230015?pwd=aGVnM2tjSkk1bm1wK01HZ1IiSE1OZz09>.

Contact: Kevin Borchers by email to techie@kbhome.net or by phone at (612) 819-8088. See the article on page 19.

Second Friday Online March 8, 7 to 9 p.m. *Bird Brains!* Our March event will begin with a conversation about the ways crows demonstrate how smart they are, and what researchers have discovered about how they can do such smart things with such small brains. Read about it at <https://www.nathab.com/blog/crows-are-as-intelligent-as-a-seven-year-old-child/>. After talking about smart birds, we’ll move toward a more general conversation during the latter part of our meeting. The Zoom link is <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/87681871712?pwd=zWbsahymiKEoSibWNbuPSi1aw2kedi.1> Meeting ID: 876 8187 1712. Passcode: 622537. For phone-only or audio by phone, dial (312) 626-6799 and enter the meeting ID and passcode. **Contact:** (612) 444-6399 (the Mensaphone) or mensagenda@mnmensa.org.

Sharp Women SIG March 10, 1:30 to 3:30 p.m., via Zoom online. Contact: Arleen Roberts at (612) 720-8847 or family@danclan.com. See the article on page 7.

Talking About Books SIG Online March 27, 7 to 9 p.m. Time to talk about exciting books. Our February book is *Turn the Ship Around*, by L. David Marquet. Contact: Michelle Peterick at peterick.michelle@aol.com or by phone at (320) 402-9876. See the article on page 10.

National Speaker Presentations for March

Theodore Talks: Sunday, March 24, at 2:30 p.m. Central. The title is **Give ‘em Hell — The Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Museum**. This was the first Presidential Library. and was established to preserve the historical materials that document Truman’s life. https://www.mnmensa.org/24mar_truman.

We will follow with a local discussion at <https://us05web.zoom.us/j/87383125718?pwd=b43UcHuKma2rt2iZX3nanLN0XTYTo1.1> with meeting ID 873 8312 5718 and passcode: V7QvsH.

San Francisco Regional Mensa: Sunday, March 10, 12:30 p.m. Central. The title is **Medical Realities from Star Trek**. Dr. Ped Bunsongsikul will discuss medical technologies that were only imagined when Star Trek came on the air in 1966, but are realities today. See https://www.mnmensa.org/24mar_SFRM.

Both presentations require preregistration. The links contain the complete announcements, including instructions on how to register.

Contact: Linda Seebach, mensagenda@mnmensa.org or (507) 213-8656.

Save the Date for our Annual Meeting!

Our annual business meeting is coming up soon. Each year, after the end of the fiscal year (April 1 to March 31), we hold our annual meeting to bring the membership up to date on the status of the organization. This year it will again be a virtual meeting, held on Saturday, April 20, at 10 a.m. During the meeting we will hear from a guest speaker, who is still to be determined, but we are excited about the candidates and potential topics. We will also hear our local officer reports, and Kevin Borchers, our Local Secretary, will speak on the state of our budget and the future of Minnesota Mensa.

Details:

What: Minnesota Mensa Annual Meeting

Who: All Minnesota Mensa members are invited

Where: Online event

When: 10 a.m. on Saturday, April 20

Why: Hear from a fascinating speaker (to be announced). Revisit Minnesota Mensa's year gone by, learn about plans for the future, and let us know what's on your mind.

Unfortunately sledding was cancelled in January due to the weather, but we have a lot of other great events planned. Join

us for one or all of the following:

On Feb. 29 at 7 p.m. join American Mensa Gifted Youth Program Manager Molly Bundschuh and your local Minnesota Mensa Gifted Youth Coordinator for a regional Zoom covering

some of the benefits and programs available to Mensa youth. See the Facebook group for the registration link or email giftedyouth@mnmensa.org. (This event was rescheduled from the Feb. 22 date announced in the February *Mensagenda*.)

On March 16 from 1 – 3 p.m., join the crew at InnerActive Playground, located at 2240 Woodale Dr. in Mounds View. The cost is \$13.25 per child and adults are free! There are activities for all ages including basketball, soccer, a playground, and a toddler area. You must purchase Day Passes in advance online at <https://www.inneractiveplayground.com/>. You don't have to RSVP, but it would be nice to have a rough idea of how many people are coming ahead of time. If you know you will attend please email giftedyouth@mnmensa.org.

On April 6 we will meet at the Science Museum of Minnesota, time TBD.

We are looking forward to meeting more of you!

Gifted Youth Program

Angela Gotz, Co-coordinator



GenX SIG

Lisa G. Sanders

I will be hosting our next virtual meeting via Zoom on Sunday, March 10, from 7 to 9 p.m. The Zoom ID is 894 3177 6959 with passcode 241512. The

link to join via Zoom is <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89431776959?pwd=S1krMFBLl0thVi9ha1JWtU5KdDdTZz09>.

There were six of us present at our January dinner at Babani's, where we enjoyed the wonderful atmosphere, excellent servers, and delicious Kurdish food. We discussed and decided we'd choose an Irish restaurant for March. However, our usual meeting date would be on March 15, which is the Friday just before St Patrick's Day on Sunday. After discussing with various friends and getting ideas, we thought it might be too crowded with people starting their celebrations Friday night and going all weekend. (People who've actually experienced that in previous years confirmed it.)

Several people agreed it might be better to postpone our Irish dinner until April (we have at least three options) so I decided that we would have our March dinner at an old favorite (where we had 10 attendees a year ago) at Khan's Mongolian Barbeque on March 15 at 6 p.m. The address is 2720 Snelling Ave. N., Roseville. Please RSVP to Lisa at Lisa.G.Sanders.Bucklin@gmail.com or on the Facebook invitation I will create. Family members are welcome to attend. You can also bring a friend if you like.

Other ways to connect with fellow Minnesota Mensa GenXers are in Facebook groups: "MN Mensa Gen X" (where I will post event invitations for our Zoom and in-person meetings): <https://www.facebook.com/groups/958072014361618/> where other GenX Facebook groups are also listed, including the original group from the 2000s, National GenX, and Mensa Region 4.

We meet via Zoom on Thursday, March 28, at 10 a.m. We'll discuss whatever comes up, or we'll stare at

Last Thursday Break

Wanda Shelton

the little boxes of the Zoom participants and wonder why no one is speaking. Is everyone frozen, or is everyone muted? How quickly or how slowly can our allotted 40-minute time elapse? If you've never attended, does this blurb make you wonder if what I've written is true. To find out, join the fun at <https://us05web.zoom.us/j/81554513753?pwd=EVPKEjzT90b53U2Fs1lnLIg9HYmCuR.1> or use meeting ID 815 5451 3753 and passcode kR42R8. We won't make you talk. We don't even have ways to make you talk—although there is a mute button to keep you from being heard. Such are the wonders of Zoom.

Contact Wanda Shelton, (651) 487-7197 or jouwan2420@gmail.com.

How smart are crows? Our topic article this month has a startling answer—about as smart as chimpanzees.

Smart birds, including corvids and parrots, display cognitive abilities comparable to those of far larger primates, despite the obvious fact that their brains are only a fraction of the size.

After introductions, our March event will begin with a conversation about the ways crows demonstrate how smart they are, and what researchers have discovered about how they can do such smart things with such small brains. After talking about smart birds, we'll move toward a more general conversation during the latter part of our meeting.

Our discussion draws on recent research, [https://www.cell.com/trends/cognitive-sciences/fulltext/S1364-6613\(23\)00281-4](https://www.cell.com/trends/cognitive-sciences/fulltext/S1364-6613(23)00281-4). A less technical article is <https://www.nathab.com/blog/crows-are-as-intelligent-as-a-seven-year-old-child/>. We have two short video clips to show you to get the conversation started.

One is a crow playing with the kind of “nesting cups” that are sold for (human) babies to play with. At Amazon, they're sold “for babies from 6 to 18 months old.” Watch at <https://twitter.com/buitengebieden/status/1720938345440674098>.



We humans are used to thinking that big brains make our species smarter than most other mammals. But birds and mammals have been evolving separately for several hundred million years. Birds' brains are structurally very unlike mammalian brains, but vastly more efficient. Functions that are associated with the cortex in mammals also evolved in birds but from a different part of the brain, perhaps inherited from their winged dinosaur ancestors.

The other clip shows a crow learning how to use water displacement to retrieve food. I don't know whether Piaget ever tried this in his experiments on when children understand that the volume of water is conserved, but the crow seems to have a similar level of understanding.

Intrigued? Come and share your reactions with other Mensa members.

When: Friday, March 8, 7 to 9 p.m.

Where: Online at <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/87681871712?pwd=zWbsahymiKEoS1bWNbuPSi1aw2kedi.1> Meeting ID: 876 8187 1712. Passcode: 622537. For phone-only or audio by phone, dial (312) 626-6799 and enter the meeting ID and passcode.

What to expect: It's all very informal. Come as you are, and leave when you must. Speak up, or just listen. And if you have ideas about articles we can use as springboards for future Second Friday discussions, please let us know.

Contact: (612) 444-6399 (the Mensaphone) or mensagenda@mnmensa.org.

Second Friday Online

Bird Brains!

Linda Seebach

Laurent's Circus*No Guts, No Story*

Cheryl Laurent

A

couple of months ago, I was reminded of an event from my youth. I was also reminded that one person's charming anecdote is another's supervillain back story. No matter.

Visiting my grandparents in small-town Arkansas in the early 1970s was boring. There were no cousins to play with, no toys, books, or games. My father and grandfather decided to drive us kids 30 miles down the road to "meet Old Mike." Mike wasn't likely to say no; he'd been dead 60 years. Two girls under nine years old were taken to see an unidentified body. Y'know, for *fun*.

Anyway, the memory made me go looking for background. I found the Nevada County Depot and Museum online. They have an article about the fellow.

A traveling salesman arrived in Prescott one summer afternoon in 1911 and died in the night. No one knew him, but the authorities saw some fancy dental work and figured wealthy relatives would eventually come looking. Nope. "Old Mike," as he came to be called, was embalmed to a leathery hardness at the Cornish Funeral Home and hung up in a cabinet in the hallway. Generations of people came to the county seat to shop, go to the movies, see and touch a dead guy. In the page's comments section, Sandra L. recalled, "A trip to Prescott to visit my grandparents ... was not complete without a visit to see Old Mike. I later took my children" What she calls a day trip, I call generational trauma.

The article also noted, "There were two other bodies in Arkansas in similar circumstances." Wait a minute. "Two other bodies?" There were only two million people in the whole state back then. To put that into perspective, the average Arkansan had a smaller chance of being hit by lightning (1/800,000) than being a mortuary's conversation piece (1/700,000). I emailed the museum's director for details.

A footnote said the state attorney general sent letters in 1975 ordering that all three bodies be buried immediately in compliance with a new law. Aha! That gave me a new avenue to research. That attorney general, Jim Guy Tucker, went on to become governor and then a convicted felon, the sort of guy with a hell of a paper trail. Sure enough, Tucker's papers and media mentions are kept at the University of Arkansas in Little Rock. I gave an archival assistant the dates and names I'd uncovered and asked her to find any reference to the letters. Since UALR is also home to a law school, I asked about what law took effect back then. Who sponsored a bill to get half-century old corpses buried? And what motivated him to do so?

Alas, all my research was for naught. The museum director didn't know anything about the other two bodies. The university archivist didn't find anything about funeral homes in Tucker's papers. The only laws about prompt burial of unidentified remains predate Mike's interment by decades.

I am at, pardon the pun, a dead end. I don't mind that. Some things are just going to stay mysteries. What bugs me is my own stupidity. It only just now

occurred to me that my dad may have been addressing a common parenting problem with an extreme solution. When children whine, “We’re BORED,” and you take them to a funeral home, those kids learn to amuse themselves.

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Steampunk gained great popularity in the 2000s. It is not new, though, and our focused discussion for March centers on the YouTube video “Who Put the ‘Punk’ in Steampunk?

The Roots and Evolution of Steampunk” by the Library Ladder. The video is free to watch and runs 38 minutes. Watch it at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SFEFWl67fLA> before the meeting, then tell us what you think. Even if you aren’t a steampunk fan, it reviews a rich history of speculative fiction over a century-and-a-half.

We’ll also share what we’ve been reading and watching and talk about the next few months of activities. After the first hour, we’ll take a break and then move to an open discussion.

When: Sunday, March 24, at 1 p.m.

Where: Online via Zoom at <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/89624230015?pwd=aGVnM2tjSkk1bm1wK01HZ1IiSE1OZz09>.

Meeting ID: 896 2423 0015, Passcode: 078455. For phone-only or audio by phone, dial (312) 626-6799 and enter the meeting ID and passcode.

In-person at Kevin Borchers’ home in Chaska. RSVP if you are not on the regular email list to be sure you get the address and directions.

Audience: This is for everyone, whether science fiction and fantasy has been a part of your life as long as you remember, or you are new to it and want to learn more. Even if you haven’t been involved in the SIG before, we want you to meet your fellow science fiction and fantasy fans.

What to Expect: It’s all casual and you don’t have to share anything if you don’t want to, there’s no pressure. Take a no-risk chance to check out the SIG. The worst that can happen is you decide you’re not interested and leave early.

Movie Outing: Denis Villeneuve’s much anticipated second half of *Dune* is our next movie outing. **The outing to see *Dune: Part Two* is scheduled for Sunday, March 3.** We’ll select the theater and time once showtimes are available. Contact Kevin if you are not on the SIG email list and want to join the outing.

Heads-up! Book Reading: Our focused discussion for May is the book *Legends & Lattes* by Travis Baldree. Baldree’s first novel garnered many accolades, including the *Astounding* Award for Best New Writer, and is a *New York Times* Bestseller. It’s available in print and electronic formats. Get in line now from your library as there’s a wait list.


Contact: Kevin Borchers by email to techie@kbhome.net or by phone at (612) 819-8088 for more information.

Science Fiction & Fantasy SIG

Kevin Borchers

**On a Whim**

Mat Rouch

When you get right down to it, everything that happens in the world (or anywhere else) is a consequence of only four things. Those

things are the four fundamental forces of physics: gravity, electromagnetism, the nuclear strong force, and the nuclear weak force. That's it. Everything that ever happened or ever will can be boiled down to some combination of those forces. At least, that's what we've been told for the last 90 years. Recently there's been speculation about a possible fifth force tied to Dark Energy, though this has not been demonstrated by any stretch.

Reading those fifth-force speculations led me to wonder just how we got a handle on the four we know about. I mean, gravity and magnetism have been known since antiquity. You're walking outside and trip over a tree root, falling on your face. Oof, gravity! Sailors navigate using lodestones. Wow, magnetism! They were kind of hard to miss.

Of course, they were described *precisely* and *mathematically* only in fairly recent times. Newton nailed down the specifics of gravity in 1687, and Maxwell did the same for electromagnetism in either in 1865 or 1873, depending on whom you ask.

Now, I am not in any way running down these two men's achievements. Newton's simple $F = G(m_1m_2)/R^2$ demonstrated that such disparate phenomena as a falling apple, the oceans' tides, and the movements of the planets were all consequences of the same force. Maxwell's equations showed that light, magnetism, and electricity were various aspects of the same thing. These were truly awesome discoveries. In fact, for a long time, it was thought that these two forces were the only ones that existed.

So, what changed? Well, in 1896 Henri Becquerel discovered radioactivity in uranium, that's what. Here was an ordinary lump of matter, spontaneously spewing out energy as if from nowhere. It did not fit into any known framework. Nothing could account for it! Worse yet, three years later Ernest Rutherford discovered *alpha decay*, in which small chips of matter escaped from atoms, previously thought to be well-nigh unbreakable. This has the effect of converting the atoms *into other elements*. It looked like 19th-century physics was quite literally falling to pieces.

Things just kept getting weirder and weirder. Other experiments convinced Rutherford that the only way to make a consistent picture of his measurements was to suppose that all the protons (and, discovered later, neutrons) of an atom were clustered together in the center: a *nucleus*. But that couldn't work. Protons all carry a positive electric charge, and as anyone who has played around with a pair of magnets knows, like charges *repel* each other. A nucleus full of protons should fly apart! The only other force known was gravity and, while it is attractive, it is many (many *many*) orders of magnitude too weak to hold the

nucleus together. Something was missing. That something was the nuclear strong force, first postulated by Hideki Yukawa in 1935. The strong force is powerfully attractive, enough to hold protons together against their electromagnetic repulsion. The big difference is that the strong force is extremely short-range, only operating at nuclear distances. The strong force pulls the nucleus together, and electromagnetism drives it apart. If the two forces are not balanced in a given atom's nucleus, electromagnetism can momentarily win out, and a chunk of protons and neutrons called an *alpha particle* is blown off.

If this sounds like a terribly hand-wavy kind of explanation to invoke, please understand that it only seems that way because I am *leaving out all the math*. In reality, physicists bend over backwards to make sure that all the numbers add up, that everything squares with the known conservation laws, that all the particles involved behave in a consistent, plausible way, and that no previously documented phenomena are contradicted. That's a tall order. Mountainous, in fact.

Anyway, using uranium 238 as an example of the above, our atom (containing 92 protons) ejects an alpha particle of two protons and two neutrons, becoming thorium 234 (containing 90 protons). As a result, our atom has hopped *two steps down* on the good old periodic table of elements you may recall from high school. Transmutation! A trick earlier physicists said was flatly impossible! But the seemingly-impossible is what you get when new forces join the game.

So, what about the fourth force? That one was postulated to solve a different puzzle that had come up at almost exactly the same time. In terms of observations one version went like this: Start with an atom having six protons and eight neutrons in its nucleus. That's what we call carbon-14. This form of carbon is unstable and will, on a predictable schedule, magically convert one of its neutrons into a proton and spit out an electron, a process called *beta decay*. As a result, we now have an atom with seven protons and seven neutrons: nitrogen. So, while the aforementioned alpha decay causes an atom to move down two slots on the periodic table, we find that this beta decay causes it to jump *up* one slot. A completely different process! And again, no wrangling or mangling of gravity and electromagnetism could account for it. This led physicist Enrico Fermi to propose the nuclear weak force in 1933.

Here's how it works, again leaving out all the math. Under specific conditions a neutron can emit a "weak" particle, called the W, which is negatively charged. Since overall charges must balance, the neutron acquires an equivalent positive charge, which converts it into a proton. The W flies off, but almost immediately breaks down into an electron (which retains the negative charge) and an antineutrino.

So... are there other forces lurking out there, as yet undetected? I dunno. We only discovered the strong and weak forces when our instruments became sensitive enough to detect their effects. Maybe there's another set for every new major observational breakthrough—turtles all the way down. That'd be fun.

Vantage Point*Songwriter*

James Satter

A

fter an evening of bar hopping recently, my drinking companion, Andrew, invited me to crash

at his condominium. I was immediately impressed by the array of artwork that

covered his living room walls, from chessboard patterns to expressionist paintings in the style of Jackson Pollock. One piece of artwork that stood out from the rest was a realistic portrait of Billy Joel.

This anomalous rendition of the singer/songwriter lingered in my mind after I returned home the following morning. I've been a longtime fan and saw Billy Joel in concert a few years back. His lyrics, more than that of any other rock star, have motivated me over the years to look up terms in a dictionary or encyclopedia. And I don't just mean "We Didn't Start the Fire," notable for documenting current events and popular culture from 1949—the year Billy Joel was born—through the 1980s.

Geographical and biographical references riddle their way through many of Billy Joel's greatest hits. "Big Shot" mentions *the people that you knew at Elaine's*. Growing up in the Twin Cities, how was I to know that Elaine's was a New York City restaurant frequented by celebrities? "It's Still Rock and Roll to Me" says *you could really be a Beau Brummell baby if you just give it half a chance*. The sardonic song motivated me to read up on George Bryan "Beau" Brummell, an arbiter of British men's fashion during the early 19th century.

Details can be deceptive, though. Case in point, "The Ballad of Billy the Kid" is decidedly ahistorical. The opening line incorrectly states that the Old West outlaw originated from Wheeling, West Virginia, rather than his likely birth place of New York City. The song's unreliable narrator takes more creative liberties with each successive verse. Perhaps that's par for the course. Song titles like "My Life" and "Movin' Out" reinforce an attitude of independence and petulance that runs through Billy Joel's body of work.

Working class sensibilities are another theme in Billy Joel's oeuvre, whether the lyrics are about economic hardships in "Allentown" or dating an "Uptown Girl." That being said, his love songs run the gamut of romantic experience. From the carnal "Sometimes a Fantasy" to the sentimental "Scenes from an Italian Restaurant," it is easy to find a song or two from Billy Joel's discography to fit almost any stage of a relationship. A nagging undercurrent also surfaces in his lyrics, including songs told from the perspective of a platonic friend or mentor. I'd be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the lesser-known song "James," which asks, *Will you ever write your masterpiece?*

I haven't been back to Andrew's place or talked with him in depth about music. On February 1, 2024, Billy Joel released his first new single in almost two decades, "Turn the Lights Back On." Although I listened to the new song right away, I've yet to hear *Fantasies & Delusions*, his classical album from 2001. Perhaps his music without lyrics could provide further insight.

B

oard Meeting – Feb. 6, 2024

Kevin Borchers, Acting Recording Secretary

Call to Order: LocSec Kevin Borchers called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

Attendees: Kevin Borchers, Bill Conlan, Bria Knorr, Michelle Peterick

Approval of the Previous Minutes: MOTION 24/02-01 (KB/MP): To approve the minutes of the November 7, December 5, and January 2 meetings. Passed.

Board Officer Reports

- Local Secretary: Membership was 883 as of February 1.
- First Vice Secretary:
 - People Team
 - ◆ Met January 30.
 - ◆ Will talk about recognition efforts proposal at March Board meeting.
 - ◆ Next meeting on February 27.
- Second Vice Secretary
 - Events Team
 - ◆ Met January 18.
 - ◆ Looking for people to start hosting events.
 - ◆ Next meeting on February 15.
- Treasurer
 - Reviewed January financial report.
 - Sales tax payment completed February 2.

Appointed Officer Reports

- Open positions and changes [Kevin]
 - **MOTION 24/02-02 (KB/MP):** Appoint Keith Jibben as Ombudsperson. Passed.
- Membership Officer [Bill C. acting MO]
 - Four new members, three move-in, and seven rejoins.
 - 2024 is Minnesota Mensa's 60th anniversary.

Old Business

- Annual Meeting 2024
 - **MOTION 24/02-03 (BK/KB):** Set April 20 as the Annual Meeting date. Passed.
- Elections
 - **MOTION 24/02-04 (KB/MP):** The Board appoints Lin Rockler, Rick Bellew, and Matt Bennis to the Election Committee for the 2024 election. Passed by email vote prior to meeting.

New Business

- Initial discussion of 2024-2025 draft budget.

Next Meeting: Next meeting will be online at 7 p.m. on March 5.

Adjournment: LocSec Kevin Borchers adjourned the meeting at 8:04 p.m.

We send a link to the online edition of *Mensagenda* to everyone for whom we have an email address. If you aren't receiving these links, you can edit the preferences on your profile on the national website us.mensa.org to allow your email address to be shared within Mensa.

M · E · N · S · A · G · E · N · D · A

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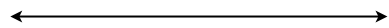
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