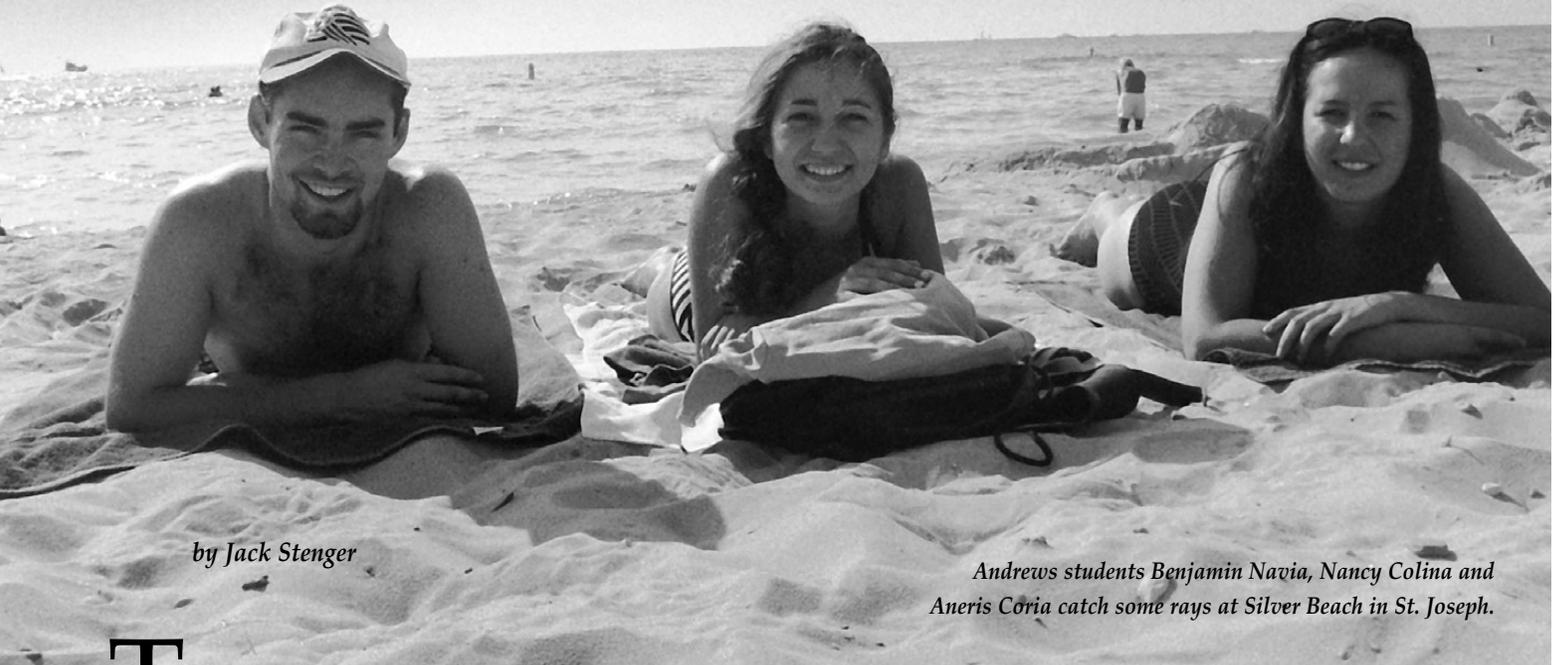


On the beach

The (nearly) endless summer at Andrews University



by Jack Stenger

Andrews students Benjamin Navia, Nancy Colina and Aneris Coria catch some rays at Silver Beach in St. Joseph.

The piercing cry of a distant gull. The calming cadence of waves against the white-sand shore. The brilliant technicolor panorama of a setting sun, where bright yellow recedes to orange, and pinkish highlights fade to darkening purple.

On the beach, children build sandcastles, parents recline on chairs, and college students finish a spirited game of volleyball. In the distance, across a trackless body of water, a silhouetted sailboat charts a lonely course.

If you think this postcard of prose comes from either the states of California or Florida, think again. Try Andrews University.

Andrews? An ideal summertime destination? It might be a paradigm shift for some, but every alumnus who has ever been sunburned on the shores of Lake Michigan knows it's true. "Everybody loves the beach around here," says Laura Gonzalez, a junior biology major from Berrien Springs. "Matter of fact, I don't know where we'd go if we didn't have it."

For years, despite all public relations efforts to the contrary, the university has had a reputation that's hard to shake—that Andrews is for Eskimos, a site of Arctic tundra or Scandinavian-length winters. Perhaps it's an image perpetuated by Caribbean alumni or students from the Sunbelt regions, folk who did not weather the long Michigan winters as well as their Midwestern or Northeastern peers.

But let the word go forth. Life at Andrews is a beach! (At least from May to September.) No, our school is not Pepperdine University on the Pacific shores of Malibu. But, yes, the beach experience is as much a part of Andrews as are

cram sessions in James White Library.

When college fathers uprooted Battle Creek College from central Michigan to southwest Michigan's fruit belt in 1901, little could they have known they were creating the possibility for a collegiate beach culture. But within a short 15-minute drive from the Andrews campus is Lake Michigan. It's the largest fresh-water body in the United States, the third largest of the famous Great Lakes, and it's bound by 636 miles of shoreline.

And they don't call it *great* for nothing. One faculty member recalled a first-time Lake Michigan beach visit for a group of students from North Carolina. Accustomed to the small, man-made lakes of the South, the girls were not prepared for the sea-like view that first greeted them. "Why can't we see the other side?" they asked. Probably because the thing is 100 miles across at its widest point and about 70 miles across from St. Joseph, Mich., to Chicago. And within sea gull-flying distance from Berrien Springs are some of this lake's most inviting beaches.

For Andrews students—past and present—the names of these beaches are as familiar as Coppertone Lotion on a sunny day: Silver Beach, Grand Mere, Weko Beach and Warren Dunes. For Berrien Springs residents, they are the "Fantastic Four" spots for afternoon and weekend getaways.

For students, any beach is generally a way to combat two present dangers of collegiate life: boredom or books. "Whenever my friends and I are really stressed by our studies or we're looking for something to do, someone always

says: 'Let's go to the beach,'" said Lorette Gray, a sophomore biology major from Toronto.

Psychologists have long written about the calming effect that bodies of water have on the human psyche, but it doesn't take B. F. Skinner to convince Andrews faculty and staff. Since 1901, when the university first moved to Berrien Springs and the nearby Michigan coast, the beach has always been a place to relieve work-related stress. Rebecca May, director of Alumni Services, said since her days as a student in the 1970s, the beach has always represented a respite from all that is taxing. "There's nothing more soothing than hearing those waves or walking the beach. We should require each student to spend one summer quarter here and mandate beach attendance. They'd be less stressed out, and we might hear a whole lot less about our winters," May says.

Because Jeff Wilson used to live in land-locked parts of both Arizona and Ohio, he said he knows the difference a large body of water can make for acquiring peace of mind. The director of Andrews trust services, Wilson said the beach's value becomes even more apparent to him when he is traveling on I-94 toward Chicago on a Sunday evening. "Let's face it," he says, "gridlock can sometimes mean something. When I see the highway full of Chicago people who drive two hours to enjoy what we have so close by, I know this area offers us something really special."

Since regulators and lawyers did not hold sway in the mid-1970s when she was a student, Raelene Brower, marketing director for the physical therapy department, said beach fires

were still the thing for Andrews beachcombers. At that time, roasted corn and vegelinks were a perfect compliment to sunset-watching. Today Brower still considers herself an inveterate beach-goer: "Every time I go I feel like I'm on vacation even though I'm only 15 minutes away from campus."

And while volleyball matches, water games and afternoon-long suntan sessions might dominate local beach activities, the shores of Lake Michigan have been a spiritual destination for Andrews students, as well.

Local residents have long grown accustomed to seeing students around a bonfire for a Friday evening vespers, and a certain "Saturday afternoon beach etiquette" has even developed over the years. Rather than swimming, dignified forms of wading are usually more common on Sabbath afternoon walks. Volleyballs and frisbees are generally traded in for Bibles and song circles. "You can usually tell the Andrews people at the beach on Sabbath because they've got nicer clothes on—and their shoes off," Brower notes.

Some Andrews faculty have used the beach as nearby "retreat centers" suitable for visitation when spiritual batteries need recharging. Leona Running, professor emeritus of biblical languages, said a professional challenge in the early 1960s prompted her to spend every day at the beach for a week, reading *Steps to Christ* and her Bible, searching for answers that the fresh air seemingly made more possible. Today, a Lake Michigan sunset never fails to transport her to the Middle East, where her professional travels have taken her. "When I see the sun dipping into the water, I imagine that I'm back in Israel

on the Mediterranean Sea."

Wolfhard Touchard, a reference librarian in James White Library, said he returns to Warren Dunes State Park every year to spend a day on the beach just around his birthday. He hikes the dunes, meditates on the beach, and generally engages in a spiritual reality check—man and Maker, communing by a fresh-water sanctuary. "I just talk to the Lord and ask Him: 'Where are we going to go together in the coming year?'" Touchard says.

Guess it's true that there's nothing like a distant horizon, unencumbered by automobiles and office buildings, to send thoughts upward—or to inspire some pitched volleyball matches. Student Laura Gonzalez says she and her friends prefer Silver Beach mostly for its plenitude of volleyball courts.

But the storied beach in St. Joseph is the "students' favorite" for more reasons than this. Silver Beach is a blaring radio, a candy-red snow cone, or a romantic walk on the nearly half-mile-long pier that juts into the lake and features one of Michigan's most photographed lighthouses. "It's the young people's beach," Gonzalez says, "or it's the place you see just about everybody."

Up to September, that is. Like all good things,

summer comes to an end in southwest Michigan. Late August rolls around, days get shorter and the once-balmy, summer-night air takes on a crisper bite. The lotion and beach chairs are packed away, the bathing suit is folded up, and the Chicago residents leave their summer homes on the rural side of Lake Michigan to gird themselves for another long winter in the city.

Watching the dying rays of a sunset from the tip of St. Joseph's pier is fittingly symbolic of the fleeting nature of Michigan summers on the beach. But so, too, is the optimistic questioning of a child on Weko Beach. Just the other day, I heard one imploringly say, "Hey, Mom, can I still go swimming? Please?"

Don't give up, kid, because she'll give in. Remember, hope springs eternal for all beachcombers. Yes, winters are long, and the "endless summer" can be a short one around here. But don't pack your lotion away too deep, because the beach is

always with us, and next May is really not that far away!

Jack Stenger, a thrice-a-week beachcomber who enjoys reading The Chicago Times while watching the sun set, is associate director of university relations.



Jessica Medina takes a break at this nearby Lake Michigan beach.

Andrews Beaches

There are more than ten beaches in Berrien County alone, but four beaches tend to be the favorites for campus beachgoers.

Silver Beach, St. Joseph The "Daytona Beach" of area beaches. Once home to an amusement park, Silver now has an outdoor amphitheater, a junk-food-heavy refreshment stand and more than ten beach volleyball courts. Area high-schoolers cruise and play volleyball here, and loud jet skis ply the waters that surround the nearly half-mile-long St. Joseph municipal pier.



Grand Mere State Park, Stevensville

Unofficially, this place is the "Sabbath" beach for Michiana Adventists. This is the au natural site, with towering dunes and beaches wholly devoid of any form of development. Best of all, there's no cost on the park's back entrance.

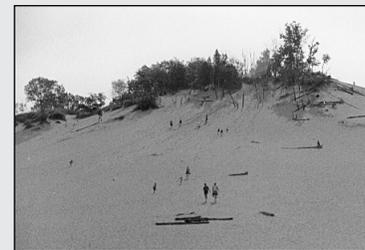


Weko Beach, Bridgman The closest beach to Andrews, a trip to Weko is a direct path down Shawnee Road out of Berrien Springs. This beach is widely regarded as a "family" beach. An endearing Weko tradition has a bugler play Taps every night for sunset and appreciative crowds always clap.



Warren Dunes State Park, Sawyer

Thanks to Chicago crowds, few beaches are as crowded as this one on hot summer weekends. Its most prominent feature is the 240-foot Tower Hill Dune. The climb is always a bear, but the running



descent is the closest most get to unassisted flight. The massive dune also makes Warren Dunes the top sled-riding site for Andrews students in the winter.