



# MYRICK HIXON ECOPARK

F R I E N D S   N E W S L E T T E R

Published quarterly by Myrick Hixon EcoPark

## CALENDAR

**January 17, 10–noon**

Snowshoe Saunter

**January 14 or 24**

3rd Grade Program  
Volunteer Naturalist Training

**January 15**

Birds and Biodiversity Volunteer  
Naturalist Training

**January 31, 10–noon**

Stellar Snowflakes

## Meet George



Hi—my name is George and I'm the newest member of the Myrick Hixon EcoPark family. I'm a Wisconsin native painted turtle! I've been living at Michelle's house for several years, but her 4-legged fuzzy buddy keeps bothering me, so I decided to move here and let children watch and enjoy my antics. My favorite past-times are basking in the wonderful UV lights and being handfed. I would love it if you would come to the Nature Center and visit me!!

P.S. I love shrimp and minnows!

## EcoCenter Construction

Construction of the new EcoCenter is under way! The foundations and floors are poured, exterior walls are up, and much of the roof is in place. The exposed beam and cedar ceiling in the exhibition hall looks great! The completion deadline is June 19, but Borton Construction is hoping to finish



the building earlier than that. After all these years of planning and fundraising, it is truly exciting to see this beautiful building begin to take shape.

We had a moment of discouragement when bids were initially opened, as the low bid, from Borton Construction, was about \$250,000 over budget. However co-owner Paul Borsheim and estimator Bill Roth of Borton Construction and Mike Swinghamer and Clint Rasmussen of River Architects, with input from subcontractors and suppliers, went over all aspects of the building searching for ways to reduce costs without affecting the functionality of the building. For example, stone surfacing was eliminated on the portion of the masonry wall within the nocturnal/aquatic room where lighting levels will be low. The office and gift shop areas will have a sheet rock ceiling rather than exposed beams and wood. A curb will be integrated with the sidewalk rather than pouring separate curb and gutter. The existing zoo maintenance building was used for a jobsite office and restrooms rather than bringing in a separate trailer. Integral rain gutters were eliminated for much of the building. Direct owner purchase was used for most major materials, eliminating sales tax. Reductions totaling well over \$200,000 were identified and approved. Without this exceptional help from Borton Construction we would not have been able to proceed with construction in 2008!

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*Greetings, EcoPark Friends!*

As the year comes to a close, we here at the EcoPark are all thankful for the many good things that have occurred in the year past. The most significant of these is, of course, the completion of our fund-raising goal for the new nature center building and the start of construction. The soaring new building—with its great views out over one of the prettiest panoramas of marsh and bluff I know of—is beautiful. Construction is ahead of schedule and will probably be done by the end of April!

I am also pleased to note that membership is growing by leaps and bounds, the Annual Appeal was a resounding success, and funding for the new live animal exhibits is starting to come in. Volunteer hours are back up to their very high levels. Michelle Nelson is now again a full-time employee wearing about 72 different hats and doing a fantastic job. Stephanie has been working hard to

make her already incredible educational offerings even better in anticipation of the new facility. The board has really stepped up its level of involvement and under the leadership of the indefatigable Pat Caffrey seen us through some tricky times. Many thanks to all of you who have helped this fine organization in so many ways.

The job security of an interim executive director is always slim, but it has been my extreme honor and pleasure to have been able to work for this wonderful organization which I have come to love. By the time you read this, we should have a new permanent executive director on board ready to lead this organization to new levels of accomplishment. Thank you to all of you who have been so helpful and given me support and encouragement in my brief stay here!

*Jim Gallagher*

**Prairie Plan**

The Natural Areas Committee and Stephanie Hanna, with valuable input from prairie restoration experts Jessica Bolwahn and Abbie Meyer of Mississippi Valley Conservancy and Armund Bartz of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, has prepared a plan for preservation and restoration of prairies within the parameters established in the City of La Crosse’s Hixon Forest Master Plan. Twelve remnant “goat” prairies have been identified in Hixon Forest. Additional prairie and savanna areas have been recreated on previously farmed areas along CTH FA along the east edge of Hixon Forest.

Realizing that resources may not allow all of these prairies to be adequately restored and preserved, priorities were established. **Top-priority prairies** include the Stry Prairie (a State Natural Area), Lookout Prairie, Zoerb Prairie, Birch Point Prairie, SE Grandad Bluff Prairie, Thompson Prairie, and the recently planted oak savanna area just south of the

weather station. Restoration work has been conducted on all of these top-priority prairies. Another top priority is controlling the invasive reed canary grass and black locust on the “Old City Farm” area east of CTH FA behind the weather station and establishing prairie or savanna in that area.

The **second priority** includes two fairly large remnant blufftop prairies on either side of the TNT trail (north side of the Hixon Forest parking lot) and controlling reed canary grass and establishing prairie or savanna in the old field west of CTH FA across from the weather station.

The **third priority** is the other remnant prairies. These are generally smaller prairies in more remote locations within Hixon Forest.

We are fortunate to have a number of these rare remnant prairie areas in Hixon Forest, and this plan will help to ensure that available resources are directed to manage

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Myrick Hixon EcoPark was established as a collaboration between Hixon Forest Nature Center, the City of La Crosse, and area Rotary Clubs. Together our mission is to create a unique destination with dynamic educational programming, interactive displays, and live animal exhibits that will advance the appreciation and conservation of our natural resources.

**STAFF**

Jim Gallagher, Interim Executive Director  
Stephanie Hanna, Naturalist/Educator  
Michelle Nelson, Business Manager

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Pat Caffrey, President  
Sue Weidemann, Vice President  
Mark Terpstra, Secretary  
Sam Sauer, Treasurer  
Gar Amunson Marsha Kurth  
Nathan Barnhart Dave Lange  
Pete Bemis Dorothy Lenard  
Josh Blumenfeld Jeff Odum  
Jim Gallagher Scott Reber  
Mike Giblin John Rieder  
Dan Graham Milt Schmida  
Clare Henneman Kathie Tyser  
Catherine Kolkmeier Ken Wing

**OPEN HOURS**

Monday–Friday 9 a.m.–4 p.m.

**Phone:** (608) 784-0303 **Fax:** 784-0322

**E-mail:** info@mhecopark.org

**Web:** www.mhecopark.org

**MEMBERSHIP**

Individual membership in the MHEP is \$25.00 per year. Family memberships are \$35.00 per year.

**NEWSLETTER PRODUCTION STAFF**

**Typesetting:** Sue Knopf, Graffolio  
**Printing:** John Maass, Sierra Printing

**NEWSLETTER DEADLINE**

The Friends newsletter is published seasonally.

PUBLICATION DATE	SUBMISSION DEADLINE
Winter	November 15
Spring	February 15
Summer	May 15
Fall	August 15

**MOVING?**

Please give us your new address so we can be sure that you continue to receive your newsletter on time. (Also, returned newsletters cost us money.) Please contact the Nature Center as soon as you know your new address and we’ll make sure you continue to receive all of your MHEP mailings. Thanks!

*This newsletter is printed on recycled paper.*

## New Members

Brooke Thurman & Family	Cheri Olson & Ben & Doug Nelson
Maggie Edge	Jane & Mark Domroese
James P. Grayson	Richard & Lisbeth Reynertson
Bill & Ann Haviland	Trista Treglowne & Dan Schraith
Norman Thingvold	Randy & Mary Mell
Anita Smith	Lissa Carlson Family
Diane & Kevin Wilson	Will Olson
Gordon Powell	Anne Stenslien
Drew & Kristie Neve	Kristie Lonsdorf
Evelyn Haack	David & Susan Foran
Ronald Garves	Jennifer Loewenhagen
Lynda VonAsten & Jim Padgett	Glenn & Lila Seager
Michael Giblin	Donna Williams
Caryn Byerson	Paul Taylor
Julie Helgerson	Norris Haumann
Kathryn & James Rozovics	Carrie Melin & Scot McCollum
Travis & Sarah Smith	Lynn Maas & Mark Ziegler Family
Bob Carney	Set Free!-Pat Pallardy
Nick, Shelly, Athena Schreck	Minx & John Hanson
Dana & Dan Skemp	Jim Jorstad
Larry & Fran Hanna	
Meghan & Mark Shaughnessy	

## Another New Board Member

Dan Graham has replaced Dean Dickinson as one of the three Rotary representatives on the board of directors. Dean reluctantly resigned since his duties as district governor for Rotary would have made him miss seven of the monthly board meetings in 2009. Dean is one of the Rotarians who has been involved from the very beginning of the EcoPark project, and he has been key in helping us raise over \$2.7 million. We really appreciate Dean's service and are delighted that he will remain actively involved with the Development Committee. Thanks, Dean!

Dan, who is the business manager for Fowler & Hammer General Contractors, has been active on the Building and Planning Committee and has been a big supporter of the EcoPark and will be able to hit the ground running as a new board member. Welcome, Dan!

## Wish List

- HP Photosmart ink cartridges (C6657, C6656 & C6658)
- Mouse food
- Clean N Comfy small animal litter/bedding
- Post-It notes
- ESU Reptile 20W Super UV fluorescent light (full spectrum)
- Zoo Med 501 Filter Media mechanical filter sponge
- Zoo Med 501 Filter Media activated carbon insert
- ESU Reptile 40-watt incandescent nocturnal black heat lamp
- Adding machine (big buttons)
- AA rechargeable batteries
- 8GB or higher USB storage drive
- Extra sand for walkway (winter)
- New snow shovel with ice edge
- Hand ice chopper/breaker tool
- Orienteering compasses
- Large digital photo frame
- Coffee maker

## Thank You

- **Wal-Mart** for your volunteer efforts, which resulted in a great donation
- **Sam's Club** for your volunteer efforts, which resulted in a great donation
- **Amalia & Aaron Brownell** for donating the black swallowtail butterfly
- **MarketSharp** for the natural keyboard
- **Autumn Beyer** for the tiger swallowtail butterfly
- **Anonymous** for the bird's nest
- **Alan Brown** for the monarch butterfly
- **Anonymous** for the bat house
- **Allan Birchler** for the wood chipper
- **Hans Mayer** for donating the proceeds from the Happy Little Elves concert

## In Honor of Jean & John Sterling's Wedding

- F. Jeffrey & Martha Oswalt
- John Rieder

## In Memory of

- **Uncle Roy Luehne**—Dwaine & Barbara Smith
- **Florence & Jack Weiss**—Punky, Ann & Signe Gronbeck
- **Peg Fish**—Catherine Kolkmeier
- Ms. Dorothy Mercier
- **John Joseph Schwem**—William & Louise Temte
- **Jane Stuckert**—Tom & Barbara Roberts, Barbara Newcomer, Signe Schroeder, Jacky O Oldenburg, Carole Baumgardner, John & Arla Clemons, Eric Engbloom, Daniel & Valerie Johnson, Irene & Wayne Peters, Robert & Merldeen Rasmussen
- **Debbie Dohve**—Ann Gronbeck Peterson Family
- **John A. Poellinger**—Bob & Ruth Frise
- **John E. Turner**—Jane Turner

## Thank You to the Sam's Club Community Involvement Committee

Thanks for choosing Myrick Hixon EcoPark as the charity to receive a \$1,000 grant!

## Thank You and Congrats!

Joe Anderson became an Eagle Scout this year by planning and implementing the repair and painting of our Butterfly Garden fence. Thanks also to Joe and his crew for fixing some of the benches.

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and preserve the most important of them. Cooperation between Myrick Hixon EcoPark, Mississippi Valley Conservancy, The Prairie Enthusiasts and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, and support from the Paul E. Stry Foundation and the City of La Crosse helps assure these prairie are preserved.

## We've Been Busy with Programs and Fund Raising

### Summer Adventures and Fun!

Another summer of educational fun and games happened at the Nature Center this year! The schedule included some great programs like Creepies and Crawlies (for 4- and 5-year-olds), Slugs and Bugs (for 6- and 7-year-olds), and MHEP's Amazing Race (for 8-, 9-, 10- and 11-year-olds) where participants earned points for different eco "tasks" such as building a shelter and identifying some marsh invertebrates. Thanks so much to the summer program assistants who helped make our job easier:

Kevin Paprocki	John Hink
Ethan Proksch	Peekachu the
Anton Proksch	Chinchilla
Rick Stewart	Eddie Valero
Tessie the	Dianna Brown
Tarantula	Clare Henneman
Susan Mosling	Alex Wardwell
Chase Mosling	Gracie

### Turkey Trot

The annual Turkey Trot 5km run/walk through the La Crosse River Marsh was a huge success and tons of fun. The event was organized by Nathan Barnhart, EcoPark board member and UW-L faculty member. The attendance was almost 2,000 people, including board members Pat Caffrey disguised as "The Eco-Bear" and Catherine Kolkmeier in the new otter costume donated to us by super-volunteer Mary Simmons. Nathan is hoping the proceeds after expenses for the EcoPark will be around \$5000! It was a fun event!

### Gallery La Crosse EcoPark Art Benefit

Ann Peterson, long-time EcoPark volunteer, arranged for a benefit art show and reception for the EcoPark in December called "Fish, Flora, Fauna, and Natural Beauty of the Coulee Region." The event was well attended, and a portion of the sales and entry fees was donated by Ann to our organization. Thank you, Ann, for providing such an enjoyable event and the chance for the EcoPark to make new friends!

### Butterfly Garden News

The Butterfly Life Cycle exhibit is over for another season. All of our visitors were impressed with the fact that they could witness most of the parts of the butterfly's life cycle in such a small space. Some uninvited guests and diseases caused challenges, but there were also great rewards.

This year we had a cage for the chrysalids that was donated by the Howe family. It worked well for the most part except that some chrysalids died due to a disease that caterpillars can get from milkweed plants called Black Death Syndrome. Apparently this disease is quite common and caused by the *nuclear polyhedrosis virus*. The chrysalids turn black and disintegrate after being infected.

Overall it went smoothly due especially to the dedication of our volunteers. Thanks to Mary Simmons, our volunteer master gardener, who was there to help in the spring, and to Greg Siemens, who was there to maintain and start the sprinkler system. And thanks very much to our Butterfly Garden volunteers. Most of them chose to be here once a week, which was extremely helpful!



*Some members of the butterfly crew.*

David Blackey	Sue Howe	Phyllis Schreiber	Carmeen	Deb Keesler
Susan Stowers	Savannah Howe	Mary Hanson	Johnston	Pat Caffrey

Finally, thank you to Boy Scout Troop 18 and Cub Scout Pack 29 for their dedicated service of dismantling the butterfly net and cleaning up the garden April 5 and September 29, 2008. Under the direction of naturalist Stephanie Hanna and master gardener Mary Simmons, the troops and their families have committed their service to the garden's opening and closing over the past 6 years. *Thank you for your dedication, Boy Scouts of America!*

Eric Holthaus	Evan Fisher	Alisha Steele	MaGuire Werner
Gregory Holthaus	Sam	Autumn Ritter	Gerry Hollis
Laurie Holthaus	Joe	Robert Curtiss	Mason Engebretson
KrisAnn Holthaus	Lonnie Simmons	Jason Lee Sr.	Scott Engebretson
John Bahr	Grant Simmons	Jason Lee Jr.	Faith Engebretson
Eric Bahr	Garrett Simmons	Jenna Lee	
John Fisher	Dylan Simmons	Heather Werner	

### Volunteers Celebrate the Holidays

The list of names in every newsletter is an indication of how many people it takes to provide our environmental programs, manage the trails and prairies, hold fundraisers and special events, and so much more. The holiday party for our volunteers is one small way the staff can do something special for those that give so generously of their time and talent throughout the year. It's a great opportunity to socialize with volunteers from various program areas and learn more about what they do for the Nature Center – and have fun doing it! Thanks to the Freighthouse, the Alpine Inn, Ben Zahn & Steph DuCharme for donating beverages for the evening.

Thank you to all who donated door prizes:

Phyllis Schreiber	Pleasuring Gourmet	Seven Bridges	Three Rivers
Crescent Jewelers	Seasoning	Restaurant	Outdoors
Nelson Flag & Display	BA Burrito	Coney Island	TGI Friday's
	Quizno's	John's Bar/Ralph's	Finnotte's

## Thanks to the Volunteer Naturalists!

A **sincere apology** to the following volunteers who were somehow omitted from the last newsletter! Your help with spring 2008 programs was much appreciated!

Ann Peterson	Josh Soldan	Joe Loomis
Carolyn Klein	Patrick Soldan	Susan Stowers
Courtney Daniels	Reenie Schauf	Ruth Habel
Ross Macdonald	Carly Dilworth	Liz Rand
Kris Troyanek	Dianna Brown	Carol Ramsey
Sarah Wooden	Mary Hanson	Jackie Rand

Thanks so much to the following individuals for their help with the fall 2008 programs:

Mary Hanson	Kris Troyanek	Dianna Brown
Carol Ramsey	George Johnston	Deb Keisler
Karen Cook	Carmeen Johnston	David Corser
Brian Blakeway	David Blackey	Judy Shepherd
Clare Henneman	Ross Macdonald	Reenie Schauf
Orey Eckes	Jon Cowan	Ruth Habel
Ashley Hoffman	Carole Baumgardner	

## Check Your Bird Seed Supply!

With all the early snow we've had this year, your feeders have probably been busier than usual. We have a small supply of various seed (Audubon Mix, cracked corn, sunflower bits, safflower, cob corn and Nyger) at the Nature Center, so stop in if you need to restock. We also have a good supply of feeders left. Thanks to the everyone who helped with the October and December sales! My list is incomplete, so I apologize to everyone that I have missed!! We can't hold this sale without your help!

Pat Caffrey	Bob Fisher	Patrick Rodriguez
Dianna Brown	Peg Zappen	Maureen Kinney
Dave Fredrickson	Sue Knopf	Dawn Horn
Mike Deyoe	Pat Wuttke	David Blackey
DJ Brotherhood	Sue Quale	Maliha Afrin
Alex Watrud	Sharon Hampson	Noor-E-Zaumet
Sam Sauer	Keith Fitzgerald	

## We Need Your Participation!

### Environmental Education Programs Need Volunteer Naturalists

If you enjoy working with children, please consider joining our great group of volunteer naturalists. Our winter programs start Monday, January 19 and run until Friday, February 27. We offer two programs for area schools in the winter. The 3rd grade program focuses on predator/prey relationships, how animals survive, and finding/seeing evidence of animal activity in the winter.

Training for volunteers interested in helping with the 3rd grade program will be:

**Wednesday, January 14**  
**OR Saturday, January 24**

9:00 a.m.–2:30 p.m. for NEW volunteers; 10:30 a.m.–2:30 p.m. for EXPERIENCED volunteers

We also need help with our Birds and Biodiversity programs for grades 4 and 5. This program involves an indoor and an outdoor component.

If you are an EXPERIENCED volunteer naturalist and are interested in helping with either part of the Birds and Biodiversity program, training will be on:

**Thursday, January 15,**  
**10:00 a.m.–2:00 p.m.**

Call **(784-0303)** or email Stephanie (**shanna@mhecopark.org**) to sign up for the training session of your choice. If you cannot attend any of the training sessions but would like to help, please contact Stephanie and she will be happy to make other arrangements to accommodate you.

### Quillin's Share Program & Festival Foods' Community Dollars Program

Do you shop at Festival Foods or Quillin's? If the answer is yes, then please continue reading. If the answer is no, then you still may want to continue so that you can spread the word to family and friends. Myrick Hixon EcoPark is now participating in Festival Foods' Community Dollars and Quillin's Share Programs. These programs benefit nonprofit organizations by giving back 1 percent of qualified sales to nonprofit organizations. Here is how it works:

When you shop at Festival Foods or Quillin's, you'll receive a receipt for every purchase you make. Drop your receipts off at the Nature Center or mail them to MHEP. We turn in the receipts after the end of every calendar quarter and receive

1 percent of all receipts (not including sales tax, alcoholic beverages, tobacco products and lottery tickets). For us to qualify for purchases made during each calendar quarter (January–March, April–June, July–September, and October–December), we must have them no later than the **fifth of the month** following the quarter's end (for example, receipts issued from July through September must be turned in to MHEP no later than October 5).

If you have any questions, please call us at 784-0303.

### Kwik Rewards Fund-Raising Program

If you are a Kwik Card user, please designate Myrick Hixon EcoPark as your charity of choice. Once we get five card holders to designate our organization, we receive 10 percent of in-store purchases—plus Kwik Trip donates an additional 5 percent on top of that amount. We also earn 3 cents for every gallon of gasoline you put on your card. This is such an easy way to support your favorite organization, us, of course! Please call **1-888-736-KWIK(5945)** or visit **www.kwiktrip.com** to designate us as your charity of choice.

## This Year's Enchanted Forest One of the Most Popular Yet

This year's Enchanted Forest proved to be one of the most popular yet! With over four thousand visitors and great weather for three of the four days, we couldn't have asked for a more "enchanted" time for all! The addition of many new characters and the MHEP's "Eco-Bear" added an extra amount of fun and wonder to the event. Not only did Hans Mayer magically inspire children to sing along with his entertaining, but Hugs the Clown also drew a crowd with her "clowning around."

We can't thank the many volunteers nearly enough for their dedication and help with all that goes into the preparation and running of this yearly, highly anticipated event. The volunteers included **many of MHEP's board members, staff, community members, UWL's "Within" group and Alpha sorority, Viterbo and UW-L students, Sam's Club, Boy Scouts of America troop 18 / Cubs Pack 29, Life's Precious Moments, Northwoods International Elementary students and family members,** and a an almost countless number of **dedicated patron volunteers** who withstood changing temps and long hours standing just to help to ensure that things ran the best they could.

Without the support of local businesses, donations and volunteers, "Enchanted" would not be possible. Your combined efforts have enabled us to secure funding for the MHEP nature center's operational costs, educational supplies and multiple programs throughout the year.

We know we can count on your ongoing support to enable us to continue to provide the Enchanted Forest and other fun and educational events each year. You can further show support by becoming a member of MHEP today. Your membership not only offers discounts on programs and activities, it also helps provide additional funding for prairie projects, the butterfly garden, invasive species eradication, new plantings, added environmental education programs and clearing of the trails in certain areas so joggers and hikers alike can continue to enjoy and appreciate the natural beauty.

Once again, **thank you, Enchanted volunteers** (we apologize if we missed anyone)! And thank you, **Magic 105** and the following special sponsors:

### Sponsors and donors

La Crosse Park & Recreation	Jim & Jan Gallagher	Bauer's Market
Braun Intertec	Mary Simmons Family	Dilland & Son
Franciscan Skemp Healthcare	Marsha Kurth	Fayze's
Gundersen Lutheran Credit Union	Sam & Lisa Sauer	Festival Foods
Schmidty's	Greg Pupillo	Howes Jewelers
Sam's Club	Kim Fredricks	Old Country Buffet
Freight House	Dorothy Lenard	Phillips Fencing
	Nate & Jess Morken	Sherwin Williams
	Forest Hills Golf Course	Taco John's

### Thank you to all these hardworking volunteers

Mary Simmons	Melissa Hanna	Robert Curtiss
Hugs the Clown (Barb Fisher)	Darlene Dochnahl	Phillip Berry
Pat Caffrey	Jessica Costello	Krisann Holthaus
Ross Macdonald	Heather Aderman	Darian Berg
Zoe Brown	Qazi Laeque Ahmed	Mark Schroth
Gordo & Mary Ann Pankratz	Maliha Afrin	Jacci Kosewski
Greg Siemens	Dawn Harm	Patty Ries
Sam Sauer	Megan Rebout	Courtney Leeman
Marsha Kurth	Liz Hitzel	Eddie Valeo
Anne Niver	Sara Wooden	Laurie Holthaus
Sue Kuhn	Robert Mini	Chris Scumen
Pat Wuttke	Dani Johnson	Keri Bansham
Jenna Blakeway	Becca Geisthardt	Patty Hendrickson
Shoua Vue	Mary Heisel	Goetz
Brittany Innes	Angela Spagnoli	Erin Kedrowski
Mary Marcou	Nicole Pernsteiner	Amanda Grosskopf
Mary Ballinger	Betsy McGinnity	Alisha Steele
Janet Bakalars	Megan Johnson	Olivia Severson
Dana Churchill	Amanda Emmrich	Tony P
Manda Barnes	Megan Leigl	Jack Smillie
Becky Meulemans	Molly Goedken	Maddy Severson
Sarah Littlefield	Elizabeth Atlitzel	Stephanie DuCharme
Kayla Konz	Carrie Collister	Megan Madson
Amber Kelling	Marissa Knaubach	Jessica Costello
Hannah Frank	Kate Paulmann	Rebecca Putzer
Kendal Zimmerman	Angela Gill	Jackie Yunker
Eddie Burgess	Holly Hischke	Danielle Prins
Brian Blakeway	Amber Liss	Mark & Laura
K. Bennowitz	Joshua Maxwell	Flottmeyer & Children
Allison Kolinski	Ashley Radcliffe	Kris Peterson
Kelly Arsvold	Melissa Howe	Sue Kuhn
	Kyle Kimmel	
	Cody Hachett	

### And thank you to our faithful baking volunteers

Joyce Abernathy	Beth Kabat	Mary Sullivan
Mary Ballinger	Sue Kuhn	Jill Peterson
Louise Bruring	Mary Ann Pankratz	Marsha Kurth
Marg Donner	Lyle & Dee Peacock	Pat Wuttke
Lois Erickson	Carol Ramsey	Peg Zappen
Nancy Goode	Renee Redman	
Mary Hanson	Sarah Stuber	



*We can't wait to see you all next October!*

## Annual Meeting Report

The Annual Membership Meeting and dinner was held November 19 at the Freight House, with a record of 123 people signed up for the great food and service provided by **John and Nancy Rieder** and the **Freight House staff**.

Board members **Catherine Kolkmeier, John Rieder** and **Sue Weidemann** were elected to another term, and **Josh Blumenfeld, Jim Gallagher, Jeff Odom** and **Kathie Tyser** were elected as new board members. Retiring board members **Kate Dunnun, Kim Fredricks, and Greg Pupillo** were recognized for the service.

**David Blackey, Clare Henneman, Ann Peterson,** and **Mary Simmons** were recognized as members of the 500 Club, reserved for those who have provided over 500 hours of volunteer service. All four continue to volunteer regularly. Their dedicated service allows the EcoPark to do much more than otherwise possible with a limited budget.

The award for outstanding volunteer service during the year (Pat Caffrey Award) was given to three co-recipients: **Sharon Hampson, Mary Simmons,** and **Kris Troyanak.** When administrative assistant Vicki Nedland Schaffer died unexpectedly in May, this terrific trio teamed up to provide full-time front desk coverage at the Nature Center. They answered phones, processed mail, scheduled school and summer programs and volunteers, paid bills, organized files, and did countless other jobs that needed doing. When executive director Jim Morgan retired a month later, their workload increased even more. Their unselfish dedication allowed the EcoPark to continue to operate as usual even though two-thirds of the Nature Center staff was gone. Their dedicated service continued until Michelle Nelson began full time as office manager in mid-August.

In addition to this exceptional “emergency” service, Sharon and Kris also volunteer regularly as volunteer naturalists, and Mary coordinated both the butterfly garden and Enchanted Forest and helped organize the annual meeting. When you see Sharon, Kris or Mary, be sure to thank them for all they do!

Our amazing staff was also recognized. **Stephanie Hanna**, our conservation/education manager, was the backbone that held everything together during staff turnover. Volunteer naturalists and anyone else who has spent much time at the Nature Center know what a great job Stephanie does with children. Environmental education is the primary business of the EcoPark, and with Stephanie we are providing a great education program!

Business manager **Michelle Nelson** is the bookkeeper, receptionist, special event coordinator, secretary, web designer, database specialist, budget manager, payroll clerk, newsletter editor, volunteer coordinator and snow shoveler, among other things. When the EcoPark is fully open she will also manage the bookstore, admissions, and concessions. She manages to get all of this done (and done well), and is always cheerful and willing to help with anything else that comes up. She is definitely the person we needed to keep a small organization moving efficiently forward!

Intern **Ross Macdonald** is finishing a degree in Recreation Management and worked full time for the EcoPark this fall. He has helped with school programs, fence removal, stone cleaning, special event planning and managing, budgeting, volunteer scheduling, leading invasive-species work parties, and a variety of other tasks. He is preparing an *Enchanted Forest Manual* that will document in writing all the steps in planning, organizing, and holding

our largest fundraising event. We really appreciate all his valuable help and wish him the best in his professional career.

**Jim Gallagher** agreed to step in help us this year as interim executive director until we are able to hire a permanent executive director. His years of experience as executive director of the Mississippi Valley Archaeology Center has been invaluable to the EcoPark, and he has led us into the process of developing a stronger board of directors, more organized and efficient committees, and an improved base of support for our nonprofit organization—all this while retaining a great, albeit somewhat warped, sense of humor!

There was a great silent auction, with lots of great items donated to help support the EcoPark. The generosity of donors and bidders is greatly appreciated.

The evening wrapped up with a very interesting presentation, “Global Warming, Global Problem, Local Solutions” by **Rob Tyser**. Following an informative overview of this sobering issue, Rob also talked about what can be done to help reduce global warming and spoke positively about some local action already starting.

Thank you to all of our silent auction donors:

The Company Store	River City Image
Houghton's	Works
<i>Julia Belle Swain</i>	The Freight House
Carol Ramsey	Greg Hanifl
Howes Diamond	Ruth Ann Knapp
Jewelers	Joan Yeatman
Maureen Kinney	La Crosse Loggers
Nancy Kotnour	Sherry Michaelson
Jim & Jan Gallagher	Gallery La Crosse
Creative Solutions	Sue Weidemann
Hair Studio	Sharon Hampson
Wendi Arldt	Scott Reber
Jim Terman	Phyllis Schreiber
John Layton	Dorothy Lenard
Mary Simmons	Glen Jenkins

## Can Plants Be “Bad”?

Lately I have been researching and thinking of a plan of attack to help with buckthorn control in Hixon Forest. I came across the following article from *Living the Country Life* online magazine, [www.livingthecountrylife.com](http://www.livingthecountrylife.com), which I thought was very informative and had practical suggestions.

### How Invasive Plants Take Root

Maybe kudzu on your neighbor’s land is creeping onto your own, or perhaps purple loosestrife is choking your backyard pond. The causes of both these problems and countless more are the result of non-native plants finding their way into places they don’t belong. And while invasive species may wreak havoc on your garden or your yard, they can also destroy entire ecosystems.

According to The Nature Conservancy (TNC), more than 4,500 foreign species (including plants, animals, and insects) have made themselves at home in the U.S. in the last century. You’re probably aware of many of them. But others aren’t so obvious. Did you know English ivy is considered a problem-causing invasive? Kudzu is another offender, which has taken over thousands of acres all over the South since its introduction as an erosion controller and ornamental in the 1870s.

“Invasive is a sophisticated word for weed,” notes John Peter Thompson, an owner of Behnke Nurseries in Beltsville, Maryland, and secretary of the National Invasive Species Council Advisory Committee. “A weed is a wrong plant in the wrong place that crowds out other plants. Invasives, if left unchecked, can eventually create biological deserts.”

### How Do They Get Here?

Invasive species have many routes into American ecosystems. John Randall, director of TNC’s Global Invasive Species Initiative, says they can come into places they don’t belong as contaminant in seed, grain, or hay. They have also migrated in the ballast of ships, and some have been intentionally introduced as ornamental garden plants or to serve practical purposes as windbreaks or for erosion control.

Individuals may also unwittingly spread invasive species, whether plants or insects, by doing something as simple as not cleaning hiking boots between hikes or transferring soil matter from one part of the country to another. “If you have a home in the Midwest and you travel to your vacation cabin in Maryland with a cord of wood,” says Thompson, “you may bring the emerald ash borer with you.”

### What Can I Do?

You can do your part to help stop the spread of invasive species and to prevent them from taking over your own gardens and fields. “Don’t use invasives in your own plantings,” says Randall, “and replace invasives with native or noninvasive species.” You don’t have to use English ivy, which can crowd out native plants and even kill trees, as ground cover, for example. Instead, you could use blue phlox or a variety of native ferns.

If you’re not sure whether a species in your garden is invasive, check with your local county extension office or contact a master gardener in your area. “People who are avid gardeners should report aggressive species they see,” Randall says. Not only will extension agents be able to help you identify invasive plants, but also they can help you come up with alternative planting ideas.

Once you’ve confirmed that you have a foreign invader taking over on your land, hand pulling it or cutting it down is the first line of defense. Randall advises using herbicides only as a last resort, as overspray can harm other plants.

### Am I Limited to Natives?

Thompson says a lot of people worry that the only way to avoid spreading invasive species is to exclude non-native plants in their gardens and landscaping. But he says such a response isn’t necessary. “Not all exotics are bad,” he explains. “Before you plant, ask yourself why do you need it. Does it have invasive tendencies where you live? Is there a native species that would serve the same purpose?”

One reason gardeners often unwittingly help spread invasives, Thompson says, is because Americans tend to think of the ideal garden or yard in terms of an English garden that features plants from all over the world arranged in an orderly fashion.

“The natural look has not entered mainstream gardening culture,” he says. “We need to begin to challenge our basic ideas about landscape and beauty. Local variation can be beautiful.”

In the end, Thompson says, the best defense against invasive species is awareness. “At least understand that if you plant seeds from overseas, you may be creating a potential problem.”



## Big Bugs and Brainy Birds

Dear Naturalist,

The other day when I was walking next to the La Crosse River Marsh along the Wood Duck Trail I saw what appeared to be a huge cockroach hanging on the grasses in the water. I looked closer and noticed that this "cockroach" had an X pattern on its back. I did not know that these insects liked a water habitat.

*Wood Duck Wanderer*

Dear Wanderer,

What you were seeing was likely a giant water bug. They are actually one of the largest insects and are about 1.5 inches in length. Their preferred habitat is streams and ponds with aquatic vegetation. They usually grab onto a plant and wait for prey. They can grab other insects and prey as big as small fish, frogs and salamanders. The giant water bug has piercing, sucking mouthparts and a short, pointed beak underneath the head. They pierce their prey with that beak and secrete enzymes that dissolve body tissues and allow them to suck up the resulting liquid. They also have wings that overlap at the hind end of the abdomen, forming an X-like pattern.

So these bugs are ambush hunt-

ers, lying motionless and waiting for prey. When not moving, giant water bugs can look like dead leaves. This allows them to hide from both possible prey and predators. They mostly try to escape and hide when alarmed.

The giant water bug is found in the northern United States and Canada wherever there is standing or gently running water. They are active year-round but are seen most often in the late summer and early fall. Usually in the fall they are leaving the shallow ponds at night to look for deeper bodies of water where they can be active throughout the winter under the ice. They are often attracted to lights such as porch lights, where people can find them the following morning.

Dear Naturalist,

I was amazed the other day because I caught the end of a nature show that explained about how some birds actually sew their nests together! Have you ever heard of that?

*Dazed in Durand*

Dear Dazed,

I heard something about those birds recently as well. So I did some research and this is what I found

on [www.naturia.per.sg/buloh/birds/Orthotomus.htm](http://www.naturia.per.sg/buloh/birds/Orthotomus.htm) These birds are called tailorbirds and are found in India and Southeast Asia. "Tailorbirds get their name from the nests that they make. They sew a pouch of green living leaves for their nest. First, the leaf is curled together by twisting spider web strands around it. Then the edges are joined together by making tiny holes on the edges of leaf with their pointed bills. Through the holes, they lace through fibers from bark, cottony seed fibers or spider webs. The opposite ends of these fibers are teased into balls (not knotted together as some suggest). Some have described the method more as riveting rather than sewing.

They apparently prefer to use a single large leaf, sewing the edges of the leaf together. Otherwise, up to 3 smaller leaves may be sewn together. In the resulting pouch, tailorbirds place grass, lined with ... soft fluffy seeds...

Living leaves are stronger than dead leaves and provide a snug and waterproof home, which is also well camouflaged. Usually it is the female that sews the nest together."

## Wine & Beer Tasting

FUNDRAISER FOR MYRICK HIXON ECOPARK

Thursday, January 29, 2009

6:00-8:00 pm

Albert's at Pettibone

333 Park Plaza Dr, La Crosse

Hors d'oeuvres and door prizes

\$30 per single / \$50 per couple

Visit [www.mhecopark.org](http://www.mhecopark.org) for more information and to make reservations

## Looking for Something Meaningful to Share with Kids? Adopt a Fuzzy Buddy!

*More than a gift...More than a place in local history...*

*Give the children in your life a gift for generations to come!*

Buy one of our fabulous donation packages and your gift recipient will receive a certificate, an adorable stuffed critter, a fun fact card on the critter you choose, and, depending on your level of donation, maybe even a nifty MHEP

baseball hat. For more information, go to [www.mhecopark.org](http://www.mhecopark.org) and click on the **Meet the Animals** link (at left).



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### Stoners

A beautiful stone wall runs through the center of the EcoCenter. The stone is being recycled from the former Catholic Charities building that was demolished in downtown La Crosse. Dan Graham and Jim Fowler of Fowler & Hammer Construction made us aware of the availability of this stone and helped make arrangements for the EcoPark to obtain it. Russ and Donna Flower and their crew from Kammel Excavating took extra care during demolition to protect the stone and sold it to us at a bargain price. The stone was dumped in a storage yard in southern La Crosse. A group of incredible volunteers dug the stone out of the rubble, cleaned each stone with wire brushes, loaded it on pallets and hauled it to Myrick Park. In a few short weeks 66 tons of stone were cleaned and loaded, all by hand with volunteer labor! A very special thanks to our hard-working “stoners”:

- |                 |                |
|-----------------|----------------|
| Nathan Barnhart | John Reider    |
| Pat Caffrey     | Sam Sauer      |
| Ben Collins     | Tom Scarseth   |
| Dean Dickinson  | Milt Schmida   |
| Jim Fowler      | Larry Severeid |
| Clare Henneman  | Fred Skemp     |
| Dustin June     | Craig Thompson |
| Dave Lange      | Pat Wilson     |
| Ross Macdonald  | Peg Zappen     |
| Bill Ohm        |                |

### Animal Exhibits

With the construction of the EcoCenter underway, the focus is now on planning and fundraising for the animal exhibits. Exciting critters like otter, elk, bear, bobcat, wolf, farm animals, aquatic birds, raptors, prairie dogs, porcupine, badger,



raccoon, muskrat, flying squirrel, bats, frogs, snakes, salamanders, turtles, butterflies and fish will all get new or renovated homes. We hope to start construction on some of the exhibits in 2009. When both the building and animal exhibits are completed we will really have an “EcoPark,” a place where people can explore, learn, appreciate, and have fun. This is a project that can enhance our community and fits beautifully as an environmental focal point in an eco-city within an eco-county, with a bluffland preservation program and incredible wetland, forest and prairie resources, all within an urban area.

### Public Programs

#### Snowshoe Saunter

**Sat., Jan. 17, 10:00 a.m.–noon**

Join us for an introduction to snowshoeing while observing the sights and sounds of nature in winter. No snow? No problem! There are many interesting wonders of winter to observe while sauntering through the forest. We might see birds, tracks in the mud, deer or rabbit browse, woodpeckers pecking from afar, or squirrels peeking out of their tree holes. This program is appropriate for individuals age 7 and older. Fee is \$3 for members and \$6 for nonmembers. Please call 784-0303 to preregister for this program, as space is limited.

#### Stellar Snowflakes

**Sat., Jan. 31, 10:00 a.m.–noon**

Graupel and stellars and columns, oh my! Join us as we investigate the wonderful world of snow! We’ll learn the different names of snowflakes and how snowflakes form. We’ll also talk about Native American names for snow, do some painting in the snow, and create snowflakes of our own! Dress for going outside and exploring! If there is no snow we will still hike and have fun. This program is appropriate for children ages 5 to 10 and is limited to 12 children. Parents are welcome to attend but are not required to. The fee is \$3 for members and \$6 for nonmembers. Please call 784-0303 to preregister for this program.