



# The Jasper County Jewel

Jasper County Conservation Board Quarterly Newsletter    Fall 2025

## **Unveiling Kramer Park**

**By Christopher Braunschweig**  
**Newton News**

Carol Kramer always envisioned a better home for Jasper County Conservation, but she never expected to see part of it named after her and her late husband.

For as long as Kramer has been a member of the Jasper County Conservation Board, she has dreamed of having a nature center that served as a hub for staff and an educational experience for the many families and children who support the department. The dream is coming true as the nature center is nearly finished.

It took years of fundraising to get to this point, and there is still plenty left to do. Kramer was pivotal in helping lead the charge for the nature center, now known as the Dana King Ceretti Environmental Education Center. In honor of her dedication to conservation, the facility will now reside in Kramer Park.

Friends, loved ones and community members gathered for the official unveiling on Aug. 15. The park sign was hidden behind a thick tarp, which Kramer pulled off with the help of daughters Anne Yakle and Katy Kramer Lee. Kramer was touched to see so many people attend the event.

“My goodness,” Kramer said with a smile. “I want to thank you all for coming. This place means the world to me. I’m only sorry that Fritz isn’t here — but he’s here in spirit — because we have dreamed about this ever since I started teaching. And that was a long time ago.”

She recalled speaking with then-Conservation Board Director Dennis Black about finding a new home for the department that kids would enjoy. He agreed and told her it was certainly possible, but it would cost a lot of money. Kramer told him she wasn’t rich, but she could definitely raise some money.

“We did that and now we’re here,” Kramer said. “...We’re ready to go to serve the kids in

Jasper County, and I’m so proud of that. At the age of 88, I am ready.”

Jasper County Conservation Director Keri Van Zante said the nature center project has been in the works for more than three decades, and Kramer has been along for the ride ever since. Naming the park after her seemed fitting, considering all that she has done not only for conservation but the community.

“It was a Conservation Board decision to honor Carol and Fritz for all of their gifts they have given to Jasper County,” Van Zante said in an interview with Newton News. “I don’t think conservation would be what it is without Carol. She knows everybody. She’s a pillar in our community ... Her impact is all encompassing.”

In October 2024, Jasper County Conservation held a groundbreaking ceremony for the nature center, which is named after Dana King Ceretti, the daughter of Jeff and Jodi King. Dana King Ceretti died in late 2009 at age 30. The King family has provided generous donations to the project and held a donation challenge.

Van Zante said conservation is still raising funds for the nature center. Currently, staff are hoping to have a grand opening as early as November 2025.



*Above:* From left: Katy Kramer Lee, Carol Kramer and Anne Yakle pose for a photo next to the Kramer Park sign. Kramer Park is where the nature center is currently being constructed. (Christopher Braunschweig)

## JCC Board Member Thoughts—15 Years Plus

By Robyn Friedman

Being a member of the Jasper County Conservation Board over the last 15+ years has been a learning and growing experience for me, and more importantly it has been a learning and growing time for Jasper County Conservation! I am pleased to have been part of an organization that has always had a focus on improvement, education, and finding ways to support the natural world around us.

Keri Van Zante is a top notch director who is always looking out for her conservation team, her board members, and the volunteers that support Jasper County Conservation. She is a leader who naturally fosters problem solving and a growth mindset with all of her team plus she is a true expert when it comes to grant writing!

Jasper County is blessed with talented, engaging and enthusiastic naturalists in both Greg and Katie, and Jade. The amount of educational programs, field trips, camps, and clubs that they lead on a regular basis is nothing less than astonishing while they are improving our county and its future by sharing their knowledge and passion with people of all ages.

Our park officers and maintenance techs are a dedicated, strong, hardworking, and supportive team, who are always lending a hand to each other and adding quality touches to the many pieces of land which Jasper County Conservation manages. We are lucky to have such a committed crew working for our County.

I have served with a handful of different board members over my 15+ years and have enjoyed getting to know every single one of them. I've appreciated our many conversations and the problem solving we have done with the Jasper County Conservation staff to help get so many things accomplished. I have an extra dose of appreciation for the two longest serving board members, Carol Kramer and Andy Stone, and I hope the people of Jasper County know just how much these two retired teachers have been giving of their time and talents with passion for conservation through their years on the board.

It has been a great joy to see their visible enthusiasm that the project of an Environmental Education Center is finally going to really happen, because I know they have been talking about it for almost double the time I have been on the board! The vision they've held through all these years is inspiring and I'm looking forward to the



Above: From left, Talia Friedman, Robyn Friedman, Keri Van Zante and Mia Van Zante. Robyn got involved with JCCB 15 years ago when she and Keri were expecting baby girls and the friendship has grown!

ribbon cutting of this new building to celebrate this momentous occasion for Jasper County Conservation!

Though I grew up a "town girl" in Pocahontas, Iowa, I spent a lot of time in nature with my closest friends who lived on farms surrounding our community or at my grandparents' cabin at Twin Lakes. As I grew up, I developed a passion for running long distance. I have had many nature experiences on bike trails and through and around parks in all the places I've lived and worked, Jasper County included. In addition, I majored in Biology at Wartburg College so I was very engaged in learning about living things and their importance to our world as part of my college degree. I have loved getting to know more about all of the parks, trails, and land we manage at Jasper County Conservation.

Beyond helping with the momentous tasks of planning and fundraising efforts for the environmental education center, I have been particularly excited to be part of opening a beautiful new park at Uhlenhopp Arboretum, being part of the extension of bike trails, supporting the creative addition of a sugar shack at Jacob Krumm Park, and being involved with decisions to add more camping and cabins at Mariposa park during my time on the board.

*continued on page 4....*

## **This Isn't the End; It's Just a New Beginning**

**By Jade Read**

To define conservation technically, one would say it is to take care, protect, and manage natural resources. But is that really what conservation is all about? To define conservation from the heart, I would say it is the sacred responsibility of caring for creation. It is the act of honoring the earth, water, air, plants, and creatures as gifts entrusted to humanity, not possessions to exploit. Conservation is taking the time to get to know the land, see what it needs, and tend to that need. Above all though, conservation is education. We cannot preserve or honor the earth, water, air, plants, and creatures if there are no future generations to love the land as you do.

My time at Jasper County Conservation the last seven and a half years has been just that, preserving and honoring the earth, but also training future generations to take the reins to continue with passion, care, and heart that goes into the world around them. You see, when you teach a child to have compassion for the earth, they will in turn have compassion toward a friend. When you teach a child to conserve resources and not take more than what they need, they will share with a neighbor when they have too much, and when you teach a child to be kind to all creatures big or small, they will take that kindness, spread it like a honey bee and watch their world BLOOM.

I have had so many good memories with Jasper County Conservation, so many, that I simply cannot count. To the staff—my dear friends—it has been an absolute joy to work alongside you in sharing the message of conservation. To you I say, this is not goodbye, only “see you later.”

Together we have weathered rain and sun, shared syrup and stories, endured derechos and heartbreak, and celebrated triumphs, books, and endless laughter. We’ve spent countless hours leading field trips, creating programs and videos, fundraising, maintaining parks, and so much more. Every moment has been a gift, and I am grateful beyond words for each of you.

To the public: These past years have been such a blessing. Sharing my love and passion for conser-

vation with you has been both rewarding and deeply meaningful. My hope is that everyone I encountered, left with a deeper understanding and a greater care for the world around them.

I’m so excited for the future of Jasper County Conservation! With the new education center underway, JCC is stepping into an incredible new chapter—one filled with opportunities to inspire, educate, and make lasting impressions on the young minds and hearts of our community.

It has been an absolute honor to be part of the vision that so many dedicated staff and board members have carried for years. Now, watching that dream come to life, I’m beyond thrilled to soon share it with my own little ones to watch them learn, explore, and connect with nature in fun and meaningful ways. What a privilege it is to

have a resource like this in our community and even more inspiring to know it’s being made possible entirely through the love and generosity of the public. It’s a beautiful thing to live in a place that truly values the land, its creatures, and the education needed to preserve them for generations to come.

As I step into this new chapter with my two beautiful daughters, I look forward to watching them grow in their love for the land and all its creatures, just as I have. My greatest joy will be seeing them flourish with compassion and kindness—extending not only to nature, but to the people around them as well. I will still be helping Jasper County Conservation when I can in the office, volunteering or partaking in programs with my littles. So this isn't the end, just a new beginning. Until next time!



*Above: Jade Read is stepping down from her position as JCCB’s Environmental Education Assistant/Administrative Assistant.*



*Friedman, continued from page 2....*

A few of my personal favorite activities that Jasper County Conservation organizes and hosts are the Jacob Krumm Trail Race in late September and the Halloween Hike in late October. The trail race route is one of the most scenic in Iowa and the Halloween Hike is consistently well done, creative, and fun for all ages.

It was also a true joy to get to be part of recognizing Carol and Fritz Kramer through the naming of Kramer Park, the land where the future Dana King Ceretti Environmental Education Center is located. Although I'm no longer on the Conservation Board, I look forward to continuing to be involved with the Jasper County Conservation team as a volunteer and advocate for all that they do and stand for. I will be one of those in the first row to cheer when the long awaited Environmental Education center is completed and the opening ribbon cutting ceremony occurs!

### **A Summer of Fun!**

Newton Noon Kiwanis continues to generously sponsor JCCB summer camps and the funding helps Conservation Staff to create camps focusing on outdoor skills, wildlife identification, water-sports, art projects, and much more! All of the camps quickly overflowed with participants when the registration opened online in April. Over 150 campers, ages 5 to 16, have spent their summer with Conservation Staff being "wild" in seven different camps that spanned 16 days!

Some of the more popular activities included fishing, kayaking, paddle boarding, racing down the giant slip-and-slide, creek stomping, pond netting, games, looking through microscopes, working on survival skills, and so much more.

We all had so much fun this summer! A HUGE thank you to the Newton Noon Kiwanis from Jasper County Conservation and summer camp participants for this wonderful learning opportunity!

Please contact naturalists Katie or Greg if you have any questions about our summer programming.



**Thank you**  **Kiwanis**  
Newton Noon

### **Summer Student Volunteers**

This year was the first of many in a long time that Jasper County Conservation didn't have summer teacher externs. Normally a big part of those externs' job duties is assisting naturalists with camps and creating their own summer camps for youth. Because there were not any applicants this year, Katie and Greg looked for help from some of their past summer camp students.

Several students who really stepped up were Claire Breuer, Delaney Woollums, Nevaeh Bown and Christian Buchli. Buchli was hired by JCCB as a summer intern, getting paid to mow and help maintenance staff take care of the parks, but he also was able to help out with the popular Water Sports camps at Jacob Krumm Nature Preserve.

Breuer helped at a camp she had attended for many years as a student, Junior Naturalists. Bowen, who came to Katie's very first Art in Nature Camp in 2009, was a huge help at the Botany and Art Camp at Mariposa Park. Woollums remembered attending Wildlife Explorers as a kid when the bird banding portion was cancelled due to bad weather, but she was able to come back to assist this year AND band birds!

These students helped with all of Katie and Greg's camps this past summer and we are extremely grateful for that. We wish them all the best as they attend college this fall, studying biology and environmental sciences!



*Above:* Nevaeh Bowen and Delaney Woollums with the Botany Camp group and their painted bird houses at Mariposa Park.

*Right:* Delaney Woollums shows Nature Quest campers examples of a frog's life cycle.



## Off the Beaten Path Trail Race

**Saturday, September 20, 9:00 AM**

**Jacob Krumm Nature Preserve**

Registration for the 21st annual trail race will begin at 8:00AM at Ahrens Access of the preserve. The 6K trail race will kick off at 9:00AM and the 3K fun run/walk will begin at 9:15AM.

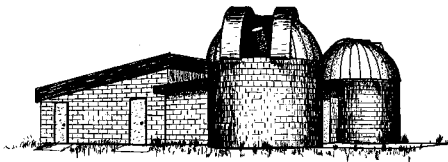
Further information, including registration forms and directions to Jacob Krumm Nature Preserve, is at [www.jaspercountyconservation.com](http://www.jaspercountyconservation.com) and on Jasper County Conservation's Facebook page. All registered runners and walkers will receive a long-sleeve t-shirt. Proceeds from the trail race will benefit Jasper Conservation Connection.



## Programs at Ashton Observatory

The Ashton Observatory will be open for public programs through the end of October on Saturday nights at 8:00PM. There will be talks inside the building and telescopes will be outside for open-viewing.

The telescopes are operated by the Des Moines Astronomical Society (DMAS). For more information or to reserve a viewing time for a small group, check out their website at [www.dmastronomy.com](http://www.dmastronomy.com).



## Youth Fishing Club

**Second Monday of each month**

**5:30-7:30 PM**

**Newton Izaak Walton League**

**889 Hwy F-36 W., Newton**

The Jasper County Youth Fishing Club is holding monthly meetings with Naturalist Greg Oldsen to cover different topics related to fishing, along with a handful of kayak/bank fishing tournaments. On October 2nd, a special meeting to welcome new members and provide more information about the club will be held, in addition to the monthly meeting on October 13th.

If you know a child in grades 3rd-12th in Jasper County who might be interested, email [goldsen@jasperia.org](mailto:goldsen@jasperia.org).

## Older, Wiser, Livelier Seniors (OWLS)

**Second Wednesday of each month**

**Jasper County Armory/Annex Building,  
1030 W. 2nd St. S., Newton**

Come for coffee and a short presentation. All programs are from 10:00-11:00 AM unless noted otherwise.

### **Oct. 8—Aronia Berries**

Mike Gilbert of Prairie City will share more about growing aronia berries and the process of making kombucha. The combination of the antioxidant-rich berries and the beneficial properties of fermented tea makes aronia kombucha a refreshing and potentially healthful drink.

### **Nov. 12—40th Anniversary of Jasper County Pheasants Forever**

Dave Van Waus, member of the Jasper County Chapter of Pheasants Forever, will talk about hitting their 40th anniversary milestone and many of the programs and projects they have achieved.

### **Dec. 10—Evergreen Centerpieces**

Make your own fresh evergreen centerpiece to take home in this hands-on, holiday program! Pre-registration is required for this program by calling (641) 792-9780.

## UTV Tours

**Wednesdays in September**

**Uhlenhopp Arboretum**

**Wednesdays in October**

**Jacob Krumm Nature Preserve**

Jasper County Conservation continues to offer tours with our six passenger UTV to view the beauty of our natural areas. Several wonderful volunteers lead these tours.

UTV tours will be offered on select days and times this fall. Please call the JCCB office at (641) 792-9780 to check on availability and to make a reservation. Tours are one hour long and can accommodate up to five people.

Uhlenhopp Arboretum is located at 2706 E. 146th St. N., Grinnell, Iowa 50112.

Jacob Krumm Nature Preserve is located at 15148 Jacob Ave., Grinnell, Iowa 50112.



Jasper County Conservation Board  
1030 W. 2nd St. S.  
Newton, IA 50208

PRSRT STD  
U.S. POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
Newton, Iowa  
Permit No. 636



**Jasper County Conservation Board**

M - F 8:00AM - 4:00PM (641) 792-9780  
email: [conservation@jasperia.org](mailto:conservation@jasperia.org)  
website: [www.jaspercountyconservation.com](http://www.jaspercountyconservation.com)

**BOARD MEMBERS**

Carol Kramer  
Bill Yeager      Andrew Stone  
Chris Herbold    Thad Nearmyer

**STAFF**

Keri Van Zante.....Director  
Katie Cantu.....Naturalist  
Greg Oldsen.....Naturalist  
Jerry Ratliff.....Park Officer  
Kent Dunsbergen.....Maintenance Technician  
Ethan Vander Pol.....Maintenance Technician  
Tristan Hunt.....Maintenance Technician  
Jacob Arrowood.....Maintenance Technician

**A Big Thank You To....**

Volunteer instructors who taught hunter education, the Newton Izaak Walton League for the use of their clubhouse and facilities for programs, our many sponsors for the youth fishing club, Bill Yeager for mowing at Uhlenhopp Arboretum, Brad Van Zante for driving UTV tours, Newton Noon Kiwanis for sponsoring our summer camp programs, Ina Heidemann for supporting our EE program and to the many generous donors to our Environmental Education Center!  
**Thank you!!**



Jasper County Conservation Board's programs are consistent with pertinent federal and state laws and regulations on nondiscrimination regarding race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age and handicap. If anyone believes they have been subjected to discrimination, they may file a complaint with the Jasper County Conservation Board or the Office of Equal Opportunity, Washington, D.C. 29240