

The Jasper County Jewel

Jasper County Conservation Board Quarterly Newsletter

Winter 2023

Caring For Conservation Auction

About 75 guests helped raise money for the future Jasper County Conservation Environmental Education Center at the Caring for Conservation Auction on Saturday, December 2. Guests were treated to food and hospitality at Sugar Grove Vineyards and Gathering Place, west of Newton, and placed their bids in the silent and live auctions filled with outdoor-related items.

The auction was sponsored by more than 50 supporting business, individuals and organizations. The goal of the event was to raise money to help build the Jasper County Environmental Education Center. Keri Van Zante, Jasper County Conservation director, said it's exciting to finally have raised money for Phase 1 of the project, but money still needs to be raised for Phases 2 and 3.

More than 50 silent auction items and prize packages were on display and for bidding, as well as a punch wall and a holiday centerpiece auction where winning bidders had their names entered into a drawing for a \$400 Airbnb gift card. Silent auction items included themed gift baskets and art. Among the 23 live auction items included a cooler full of fishing equipment, cabin stays, a trip to Dubuque, a wine barrel sink and box seating for 10 at an Iowa Cubs game. The live auction was led by Jarret Horn. According to Jasper County Conservation representative Jade Read, the official total amount raised was \$13,424.

The Jasper County Conservation Environmental Education Center has been years in the making. The 7,200-square-foot, state-of-the-art facility is to be located on 40 acres of land next to the Jasper County Sheriff's Office. The center will feature a display area, laboratory, classrooms, and an outdoor viewing platform. The center will be a green energy design and will utilize photovoltaic cells and passive solar and geothermal energy. It will provide public conservation education, outdoor learning experiences, and space for staff use. Construction will begin on the center spring of 2024!



Above: Some of the items on the live auction, one of the many centerpieces that were up for auction, and (left) auctioneer Jarret Horn getting bids from the upstairs.

Special thanks to The Jewelers Bench and Van Hemert Family Dentistry PC for being title sponsors of our 2023 Caring for Conservation Auction!

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JEWELERS
B•E•N•C•H



van hemert
FAMILY DENTISTRY

Ashton Observatory's 40th Anniversary

On Saturday, October 7, members of The Des Moines Astronomical Society (DMAS) and Jasper County Conservation celebrated the 40th anniversary of the Ashton Observatory building. Fifty-five people attended the dedication program, including Jasper County Conservation Board member Carol Kramer, Director Keri Van Zante, and Naturalist Katie Cantu. Norm Van Klompenburg spoke on behalf of DMAS.

Ashton Observatory officially opened to the public on Saturday, October 8, 1983, and has been inviting viewers of the night sky ever since.

Carol Kramer was on the conservation board when Ashton Observatory was built. At the time, Dennis Black was Director. He was unable to attend the event, but Carol read this message from him: "I've always savored the fact that the Conservation Board made a wise decision back when approached by DMAS for the observatory. Staff, then and since, have all worked to make it a success. During my time, Mark (Wagner) and Katie (Cantu) were devoted to its informational program. Both organizations worked as a team."

While the Des Moines Astronomical Society was first formed in 1970, DMAS had no observatory of their own until 1983. The Ashton Observatory building was a collaborative effort between Jasper County and The Des Moines Astronomical Society, Inc. The original design included a small classroom between the two domes to provide a place for presenting public lectures as well as a meeting room for club members and Jasper County Conservation programs.

Ashton Observatory is located in the beautiful Ashton Wildwood Park, about 7 miles west of Baxter off Hwy. F-17. Night skies are remarkably dark at the Observatory, compared to the nearby metropolitan light pollution. From Ashton, the Milky Way can be seen on clear nights without a bright Moon - something impossible from urban locations. The observatory has two domes, one housing a 16 inch diameter f/5 Newtonian reflector telescope, and the other has a 14 inch diameter Schmidt-Cassegrain telescope, f/10. Mounts for both are computerized to track selected targets in the night sky.

Ashton Observatory has served thousands of visitors from central Iowa, the Midwest, and from around the world. On a single night in 1986, during the observations of Halley's Comet, 1200 guests were treated to a spectacular show! In April of 1994, 60 visitors were lucky to observe

the Aurora Borealis dance across the northern horizon and during the spectacular Comet Hale Bopp passage in 1997, more than 1500 central Iowans were able to see the comet's fascinating nucleus at the observatory. In 2003, several hundred visitors came to get a look at Mars on its closest pass by Earth.

In 2002 a full-size (30x30 feet) classroom was added to the observatory, made possible by financial support from the Fred Maytag Family Foundation, the Jasper County Conservation Board, DMAS members, and public/visitor donations. The new classroom doubled the capacity of the facility and is an exciting atmosphere for presenting lectures and workshops, such as the weekly Public Night events that DMAS offers each Saturday from April through October.

Saturday night public programs are over for the season, but will start up again at the beginning of April. More information about The Des Moines Astronomical Society can be found at www.dmastronomy.com.



Above: As the observatory domes are built, Dennis Black checks out the massive pier concreted into the ground that will eventually hold a large telescope.

Below: The Ashton Observatory nears completion in 1983.



Older, Wiser, Livelier

Seniors (OWLS)

Jasper County Conservation Office,
1030 W. 2nd St. S., Newton

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

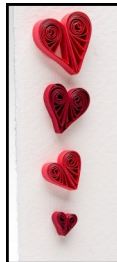


Jan. 10—Crisis Canines of the Midlands

Captain Steve Ashing of the Newton Fire Department will be joined by his partner in training, K9 River, who is a certified Therapy Dog. They will present on how this new program is pairing First Responders with certified Therapy Dogs to provide Animal Assisted Crisis Response to those who respond to and are affected by critical incidents within their communities.

Feb. 14—Paper Quilling

Heidi Holley will take us through the fun and easy process of paper quilling. We'll use our creations to make beautiful Valentines or blank greeting cards!



Scavenger Hunt 2023

We are hoping many have chosen to participate in this year's scavenger hunt. Twelve riddles and photo clues were shared on our Facebook page, @jaspercountyconservation, the first Friday of every month. Participants were challenged to solve the riddles about something specific in Jasper County Conservation parks and collect word or number "clues" from each area.

You may still view all the riddles in the "Jasper County Scavenger Hunt" event link on our Facebook page. Please do not share your answers on social media so that everyone has a chance to find them on their own!

Each of the twelve riddle answers will be used at the end of the year to solve one last puzzle. Send or bring us your riddle answers by December 31st and we'll send you the final puzzle. If you complete the puzzle with the correct numbers and words from the scavenger hunt, you'll be entered into a drawing for a free, one night stay at the Uhlenhopp Arboretum cabin! Good luck, and enjoy your county parks!



Ski & Snowshoe

Saturday, January 13, 1:00-3:00 PM
Saturday, January 20, 1:00-3:00 PM
Saturday, February 3, 1:00-3:00 PM
Saturday, February 10, 1:00-3:00 PM
Jasper County Armory/Annex Building
1030 W. 2nd St. S., Newton



Try out the cross-country skis and snowshoes with Jasper County Conservation! We have equipment in all sizes, so bring the whole family. Check in behind the Armory Building for equipment and then spend the afternoon exploring Maytag Park in the snow.

There is a \$5.00 fee per person to check out the equipment and a limited number of skis and snowshoes. If there is no snow cover, the program will be cancelled. Call (641) 792-9780 the Friday before to check on conditions or watch our Facebook page for updates.

Family Winter Rec Day

Saturday, January 27, 1:00-4:00 PM
Newton Izaak Walton League
889 Hwy. F-36 W, Newton

Jasper County Conservation and the Emerson Hough Chapter of the Izaak Walton League are partnering up to provide a family winter sports day at the Newton Izaak Walton League. Try out ice fishing, snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing. All equipment and bait will be provided. This event will be cancelled if we do not have snow or good ice conditions. *Fee: \$5/person.*



Upcoming Maple Syrup Season

Our staff is excited for the 2024 maple syrup season. The Sugar Shack will be open to the public during operation hours for a short tour and explanation of the process. Open house times and other updates are posted on our Facebook page, @jaspercountyconservation. Typically the season runs from late February to mid-March but it will be weather-dependent.

Once production starts, Uncle Jake's Pure Maple Syrup will for sale at our office while supplies last. We look forward to a good year and hope to see you out there!



19th Annual Trail Race Results

Jasper Conservation Connection organized it's 19th Annual Off the Beaten Path trail race and fun run at Jacob Krumm Nature Preserve with about 60 participants competing on Saturday, September 23rd. Thank you to all of our volunteers and race participants!

Overall winner of the 3K was Garrett Cantu, age 8, with a time of 16.31. The 6K winner was Keegan Parrott, age 32, with a time of 23.37.

Race times are posted on our website at www.jaspercountyconservation.com. We hope to see you all again next year!



Right: Keegan Parrott, winner of the Off the Beaten Path 6K trail race and Garrett Cantu, winner of the 3K .

Mariposa Cottage Update

A lot of progress was made at the new Mariposa Park cottage, which will be called "Coneflower Cottage." The exterior is finished and county staff will work on the interior this winter, with the plan of the cottage available to rent starting in summer of 2024.

The new campground at Mariposa will also be ready next summer, having 15 sites with water and electricity hookups available for \$25/night. There is a shower house and dump station at the new campground. Reservations for both the cottage and campground will be made at www.mycountyparks.com starting next spring. The primitive campground at Mariposa Park will still be available with rates at \$12/night.



"Magic of Nature" Halloween Hike

The 19th annual Halloween Hike, sponsored by Jasper County Conservation, Newton's Emerson Hough Chapter of the Izaak Walton League and Newton Community Theatre, was held at the Newton Izaak Walton League clubhouse on October 27th. About 200 visitors attended.

Hikers learned about animals and met fun characters in six skits at the "Magic of Nature" hike. Many of the performers have sang in productions at the Newton Community Theatre. They were: Rachel and Terry Faidley, Sandy and Harvey Olsthoorn, Lonnie Appleby, Will Edgar, Scott Schaeffer, Kristine Perkins, and Katie Taylor. Special thanks to Cindy Healy for coordinating the performers, skits, and costumes!

Halloween Hike visitors also enjoyed hotdogs provided by the IKES, roasted marshmallows at the campfire, and looked for animal tracks during the blacklight tracking activity.

Thanks to all of our wonderful volunteers and participants who make this event a success every year! If you would like to help with next year's event, please contact the JCCB.



Above: Halloween Hike performers put on another fantastic show at the Newton Izaak Walton League. From left to right: Rachel Faidley, Terry Faidley, Scott Schaeffer, Kristine Perkins, Will Edgar, Sandy Olsthoorn and Katie Taylor.

Right: Lonnie Appleby performs as Olaf at the "Magic of Nature" Halloween Hike.



Volunteer Spotlight

We would like to recognize Joyce Finch, Bev Taber and Kaylene Rinehart as our Jasper County Conservation Volunteers of the Year! These wonderful ladies have stepped up above and beyond to help conservation staff with events throughout the year.

Much of the delicious food served at the two major conservation fundraisers this year were provided by Joyce, Bev and Kay. They brought baked goods and appetizers and served food at the Conservation Golf Classic in May and again at the Caring for Conservation Auction at Sugar Grove this past December.

They also volunteered to help with our first native plant sale last spring. It was a lot of work transplanting hundreds of tiny prairie seedlings, but they came for a couple days and got the job done quickly and made it a lot of fun as well!

When we needed holiday centerpieces for the auction fundraiser, they jumped in and went to work again, creating lovely items that helped raise money for the nature center project.

We greatly appreciate all their time helping make conservation events fun and successful, and we can't wait to work with them all again next year!



Above: Conservation's Volunteers of the Year, Bev Taber, Kaylene Rinehart and Joyce Finch.

Right: These stunning blank greeting cards are for sale at the conservation office, only \$15/package! More information is at

www.jaspercountyconservation.com!



Celebrate your Love of the Land

Make a Gift to Jasper County Conservation

Celebrate the people in your life who have instilled a lasting love of wild places. Make a tribute gift to Jasper County Conservation today!

Since 1962, Jasper County Conservation has protected over 3,000 acres of local prairies, woodlands, wetlands, lakes, rivers and streams, and has created almost 40 miles of trails. Our dedicated education staff meet with over 15,000 children and adults each year to teach about the outdoors. At the heart of our mission are people who love the outdoors. People like you!

Whether your gift signifies your love of nature, or is a way of remembering a loved one, it will support the ongoing protection, restoration and exploration of special places right here in Jasper County. You can even choose to direct your gift to a specific project or program. Our Environmental Education Center Project is now funded, but Phases 2 and 3 still need your support! Build on the legacy of the nature lover in your life by protecting more of the places you both love - for the land, water, wildlife, education, and future generations of outdoor enthusiasts.

Want us to notify your honoree for the holidays? Give before noon on Monday, December 18, include your honoree's name and address and we'll mail them a personal Christmas card sharing your special donation! Your honoree's name will also appear in the Spring 2024 issue of The Jasper County Jewel newsletter if you desire.

For more information, contact the Jasper County Conservation office at (641) 792-9780 or stop by and see us at 1030 W 2nd St. S in Newton.

As the new year approaches, are you making resolutions to:

- Get involved with a group that is making a difference locally
- Donate to a great cause
- Help protect wildlife and take care of the environment
 - Stay active and young at heart
- Learn new things
- Spend more time outdoors
 - Meet new people
 - Have fun!

Please consider volunteering with Jasper County Conservation! We would love to add you to our dynamic group of supporters. Contact our office by phone or email to learn more about the opportunities available.

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

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JASPER COUNTY
CONSERVATION

Jasper County Conservation Board

M - F 8:00 - 4:00 (641) 792-9780
email: conservation@jasperia.org
website: www.jaspercountyconservation.com

BOARD MEMBERS

Robyn Friedman Carol Kramer
Bill Henninger Andrew Stone
Chris Herbold

STAFF

Keri Van Zante.....Director
Katie Cantu.....Naturalist
Greg Oldsen.....Naturalist
Jade Read.....Admin/EE Assistant
Dennis Cooling.....Park Officer
Jerry Ratliff.....Park Officer
Kent Dunsbergen.....Maintenance Technician
Ethan Vander Pol.....Maintenance Technician
Jacob Arrowood.....Maintenance Technician

Special thanks this past fall for....donations from Ina Heidemann, Bill Yeager and the Emerson Hough Chapter of the Izaak Walton League. Thank you to Bev Taber, Joyce Finch, Kaylene Rinehart and Frida Ahrens for making holiday centerpieces, Colette Hill for donating the auction venue, Claudia Beckwith for keeping the bird feeders filled at Jacob Krumm Preserve and to Brad Van Zante and Kraig Holubar for driving the UTV tours at Uhlenhopp Arboretum. Thanks to all our wonderful volunteers who presented for the OWLS group and who helped with the trail race, Halloween Hike, conservation auction donors and many fall field trips! **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, sexual orientation, gender identification, 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