Radish

HEALTHY LIVING FROM THE GROUND UP

Quench *your* thirst

Refreshing summer drinks

JULY 2013

Barefoot Gardens

Milan Bottoms BioBlitz

Five exercises to do anywhere

radishmagazine.com

from the editor

Nathanial Cleveland, a student enrolled in sustainability courses at Scott Community College, helps set up solar panels to power electronic equipment during the BioBlitz. (Photo by Chet Strange / Radish)

We're always excited when a new issue of Radish hits the stands, but this month we are particularly enthused about a special feature on pages 16-19 highlighting the recent BioBlitz at the Milan Bottoms, a nature preserve southwest of Rock Island. The event was truly a collaborative effort, utilizing the combined talents of scientists, master naturalists and volunteers from across the region. For our part, writers from Radish teamed up with our colleagues from The Dispatch and The Rock Island Argus to provide full, 24-hour coverage of the event — a first for Radish!

I was lucky enough to be at the BioBlitz as the event kicked off, and one of the things that caught my eye was just outside the tent where the scientists would be working: a small array of solar panels and a wind turbine deployed in the adjacent prairie. Ryan Light, a specialist in portable renewable energy systems, explained to me they could generate a combined 420 watts per hour, which is how the participants in the BioBlitz were able to power their laptops, lights and other equipment throughout the event.

Through his Princeton, Iowa, company, International Robotic Inspection Service (IRIS), Light has set up alternative energy systems at remote project sites throughout the world. A former Peace Corps volunteer, he has a unique appreciation for the ability of green energy to provide electricity in places far removed from the grid. On the day of the BioBlitz, Light (was there ever a better name for a man working in solar energy?) was donating his services. He may not have identified a single fish or insect, but his contribution to the event was critical. Without Light's ability to provide electricity, much of what was accomplished within the 24 hours of the BioBlitz would have had to take place off-site. There are no power outlets in the middle of a floodplain nature preserve.

Critics often paint alternative energy systems as playthings of idealists or pie-in-the-sky technologies that are novel but hardly necessary. That couldn't be farther from the truth. As the BioBlitz demonstrated, such technologies are inherently practical in the here and now. Of the many collaborations that took place at the BioBlitz, it was great to see Light and his assistant working with the scientists to get the job done.

— Sarah J. Gardner
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HEALTHY LIVING FROM THE GROUND UP

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the grapevine

From our readers

"Thanks to all of you great fans that came to the Radish Healthy Living Fair to do recycled art with your children. This was our third year at this event and it was a HUGE SUCCESS. Hundreds of people and the event is SO well coordinated. KUDOS to the Radish Magazine crew for another great fair. Can't wait until next year!"

— Angela Mapes, Reusable Usables, LeClaire, Iowa

Rethinking turf (June 2013): "I am thinking this guy is a pioneer — I love this and it makes a lot of economic and ecological sense!"

— Blair Frank, Iowa City

"What great information on alternatives to resource guzzling turf-grass lawns."

— Mary Kirkpatrick, Iowa City

Gaby at the stove (June 2013): "I found Chef Gaby online when searching for a solution for my dad and stepmom. Eating the right foods was the challenge in keeping my parents independent and in their own home. They are extremely happy with the food and their health is better than it has been in years."

— Mary Wilson, Austin, Texas

Hello, buffalo (May 2013): "I love the buffalo meat so so much. Thank you so much … keep up the good work."

— Ryan K. Wilson, Fairfield, Iowa

On the Road with Radish

We love to meet our readers! Thanks to Friends of Radish, you can find representatives of the magazine this month at the **Dewitt Farmers' Market,** Thursday, July 11, at Lincoln Park at the intersection of 5th Avenue and 10th Street, DeWitt, Iowa. The market is open from 4-7 p.m.; Radish will be there from 4-5 p.m.

For more information about this and other area farmers' markets, don't forget to check out the directory on radishmagazine.com/markets. Get up to date information on the times, dates and locations of farmers' markets near you.

To discover more upcoming events of interest, see the events calendar at radishmagazine.com.

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healthy living from the ground up

features

in every issue

on the cover

Refreshing beverages to make and enjoy this summer. (Photos by Paul Colletti / Radish)

departments

radishmagazine.com

The Nahant Marsh Education Center in Davenport recently rented 24 goats from a Wisconsin company as part of a study to see how effective they are at clearing invasive weed and brush species and helping to restore prairie areas. Research coordinator Victoria Green said the goats make a lot of sense. The prairie is more in tune with grazing animals, she said, as that's what buffalo, elk and deer did on the prairie for tens of thousands of years. Read more about it at radishmagazine.com.

School is in session

Nearby 'folk school' teaches hands-on, old-world skills

By Hector Lareau

For Melinda Stockwell, it's a matter of preservation. To keep traditional arts and crafts alive, the Villages Folk School of Van Buren County, Iowa, offers getaway-sized weekend courses in seemingly countless folk arts, as well as longer classes. Says Stockwell, director of the school, "In just a couple of generations, this stuff is going to be gone (if the traditions aren't passed down)."

Founding faculty member Pat Crawford believes the younger set needs her knowledge. "(They need) to know that a lot of these materials they can make themselves," she says. "They don't need to go to the store and buy them and rely on another country to produce them."

The folk school movement originated in Denmark in the 19th century and migrated to the U.S. shortly thereafter. The schools come, according to Stockwell, in three primary varieties. The best-known spring from artists who give their estates to create schools. Another forms when a community organizes around a theme, like an old-world art. Villages Folk School is the third type, a nonprofit advancing the idea that, "as a nation we need to preserve all of our traditional arts and crafts," she says.

Conducted throughout southeast Iowa's Van Buren County on work-friendly schedules, the Villages Folk School is different from schools with dorms and weeklong sessions — as well as the expense of long on-site stays. "The mission here is that everyday folks can come take the classes," says Stockwell. Most are done in a day or a weekend, and longer classes are split up over day-and-a-half sessions so people who work and have a family can attend.

Artist John Preston conducts an outdoor folk school class on landscape drawing and painting. (Submitted)

From fiber arts to foraging

The experience also differs from the instruction you might pull up on a smartphone. "Get together with yourself, get together with mother nature, and sit with an 86-year-old woman for a quilting class," Stockwell suggests. "That is so different from what you'd learn on the Internet."

"You step back in time when you come down here," says Betty Printy, one of the school's founding faculty. The school's setting seems to have stepped to one side of time's stream: you won't find a single traffic light in all of Van Buren County. Betty says that helps visitors focus on folk arts and to, "take a look at life — the basics, the things they need to know."

Crawford shares the skills her parents and grandparents used to survive the Great Depression, including how to forage edibles by season. Talking about using lamb's-quarters, dandelions and other spring edibles for salad greens ("old-timers called them 'spring tonic' "), Crawford points out "they were once brought over with settlers and cultivated in gardens. Then they naturalized and became so plentiful that people now see them as weeds."

Her knowledge of plants extends beyond the edible, and includes making paper and spinning animal and plant fibers into thread, such as the fibers she spins from dog's bane milkweed that she crochets into belt pouches.

To blacksmithing and more

Instructor Bill Printy talks about blacksmithing in timeless terms: "It's a very elemental kind of thing — you're working with fire and hand tools. There's a lot of fire and smoke and noise and banging around and then something emerges that's useful or artistic or both."

Bill has been banging around in Bentonsport, Iowa, for a long time now. Norwood Teal invited him to a blacksmith shop there about 30 years ago, just to do some work on weekends. Over the years, Bill took over the smithy, took on an apprentice (Mark, who has been with him for 16 years), and expanded the business to accommodate more and more students. (In an interesting example of heritage transmission among folk schools, both Bill and Mark have gone to the John C. Campbell Folk School in Brasstown, N.C., for continuing training.)

Normally, Bill doesn't accept students younger than 14 — they aren't mature enough to be safe at the anvil — but a mother from northern Iowa persuaded him that her 12-year-old son had enough experience to be safe. As the youngster held his own with the grown-ups in class, Bill learned he came by his ability honestly: he was Norwood Teal's grandson. "Now it's come full circle," Bill says. "Norwood would've been real proud of him."

Folk-school students don't fit into one type. Bill has taught doctors and bankers and lawyers. "I don't know very many men who don't deep down have a desire to step back in time and learn an old craft like blacksmithing." Two dentists recently flew in from Honolulu on a short vacation to take the classes. While they were pounding away at the forge, their wives shopped through the county.

Classes offered by the Villages Folk School of Van Buren County include a blacksmithing course taught by Bill Printy and Mark Heisdorffer (above) and a class on broom making (left). (Submitted)

While the Villages Folk School offer a learning alternative to a beach-and-sun vacation spot, Stockwell says the school has a vision of interdependence. "We're looking to preserve heritage and to keep a village kind of setup, where people need what you know, so you can make a living at it. We don't need people to darn socks anymore. Now not everyone in the community is valuable. We want to return to that." And to turn away from disposability. Stockwell explains, "Like, your Mom has a pitcher she was given as a wedding gift and she has used ever since, instead of buying several from Wal-Mart over the same time. You do it right, it lasts forever."

Betty Printy knows a things or two about doing pitchers right. Her signature incorporation of actual flower blossoms into pottery went nationwide — even to Honolulu. "Six or seven years ago, (then-)Gov. Vilsack came and had me make 2-quart pitchers for each governor," she recalls. "Plus 300 more for folks that heard about them."

Hector Lareau is a regular Radish contributor. For more information about Villages Folk School and available classes, visit villagesfolkschool.com.

Thirst quenchers

Cool off with these refreshing, colorful beverages

By Sarah J. Gardner and Laura Anderson Shaw

Ah, summer! Whether you are getting ready to kick back on a shady porch or head out for a picnic in the park, chances are you also are thinking of mixing up a tasty beverage to take along. Before you reach for the store-bought powdered punch mix, though, consider the possibilities of something a little more homemade. With about as much effort as it takes to make a sandwich, you can mix up a drink in your own kitchen that is flavorful and crisp, the perfect pick-me-up for a hot afternoon.

Laura Anderson Shaw is a writer on staff at Radish magazine; Sarah J. Gardner is the editor. Have a favorite drink recipe of your own? Tweet us a link at #RadishRecipes.

Photos by Paul Colletti / Radish

This pretty-in-pink drink is fast and easy to make. Its delightful texture is light, yet creamy, and it tastes best when you drink it through a fun straw. A great way to start a hot summer day!

2 cups ice

1½ cups seedless watermelon

6 ounces vanilla or light vanilla yogurt*

In a blender, combine ice, watermelon and yogurt. Cover and blend until smooth and slushy. Makes about 2 servings.

*Try a flavored yogurt such as strawberry or blueberry to easily transform the taste, or Greek yogurt for a more smoothie-like drink.

The smell of fresh lemon rising from the bowl as you make the lemon sugar for this drink is reason enough to mix up a batch, but — bonus! — the residual sugar left on your hands afterwards also acts as an exfoliating scrub when you go to wash your hands.

2-3 lemons

½ cup sugar

Sprigs of fresh mint

Water

To prepare the lemon sugar, use a Microplane grater or other zesting tool to zest the lemons (being careful to remove only the outer yellow skin and not the spongy white pith below). Combine the zest in a medium size bowl with the sugar. Using your hands, massage the lemon zest into the sugar until the sugar turns a pale yellow and the two ingredients are thoroughly mixed (1-2 minutes). Spread sugar on a piece of wax paper and allow to dry overnight. Then, store in an airtight glass container in a cupboard as you would any other sugar until ready to use.

To make the lemonade, put two heaped spoonfuls of lemon sugar in a glass and add the leaves from 1-2 sprigs of mint. Use the handle of a wooden spoon or a muddler to mash the mint and sugar together. The mint leaves will shred as they are mashed. When the sugar and mint are thoroughly mixed and you can faintly smell the mint, fill the remainder of the jar with water and mix to dissolve the sugar. Drink as is, or strain and serve over ice.

Don't have lemon balm growing in your garden? No problem. Lemon verbena or lemon thyme are both good substitutions in this tasty drink featuring hibiscus, infusions of which are popularly consumed in Egypt where it is believed to regulate body temperature.

4 cups tap water

¾ cup sugar

1 cup hibiscus flower petals*

1 cup packed fresh lemon balm leaves

2-inch piece of fresh ginger, peeled and sliced thinly

Mineral water, soda water or other fizzy beverage

To make the drink concentrate, combine tap water and sugar in a medium saucepan. Bring to a boil and stir to make sure sugar has dissolved, then remove from heat. Add hibiscus petals, lemon balm and ginger slices. Cover with a lid and allow to steep 20-30 minutes. Strain liquid into a glass container and discard the solids. Refrigerate the hibiscus concentrate, which can keep for up to a week in the refrigerator. When ready to serve, fill ⅓ to ½ of a drinking glass or pitcher with concentrate, then fill the remainder with ice and mineral water, soda water or other fizzy beverage and give it all a stir. Adjust to taste.

*Hibiscus petals can be found in the bulk sections of grocery and health food stores. Alternately, 10 tea bags of a hibiscus tea can be substituted.

Hibiscus Tickler

Cucumber Cooler

This fresh, beautifully green drink is nice and light. With a semi-salty flavor tinged with a hint of lime, it is reminiscent of the tastes of Mexican cuisine and is a great compliment to a bowl of chips. Blend it up any time you need to cool off and rejuvenate.

1½ cups ice

½ cup water

2 medium-sized cucumbers (peeled, seeded and sliced)

1 lime

Salt

Agave nectar or other sweetener

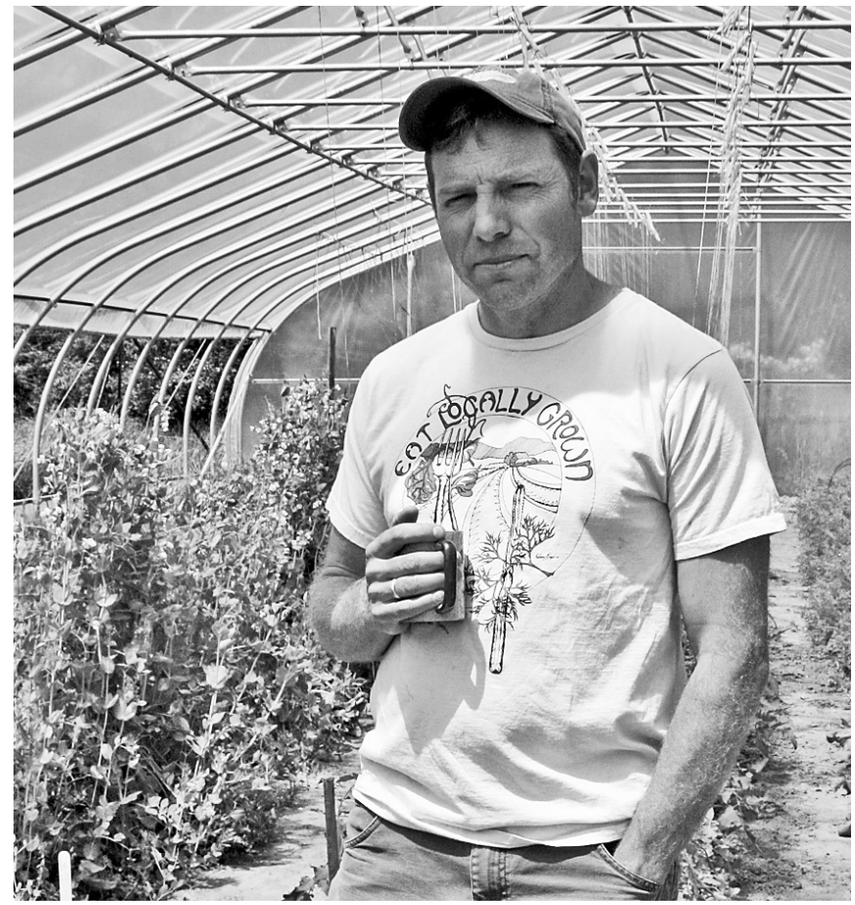
In a blender, combine ice, water and cucumber. Cover and blend until smooth and slushy. Squeeze and stir in lime juice. Add a sprinkle of salt and agave nectar or other sweetener to taste. Makes about 2 servings.

grower of the month

Barefoot Gardens

Bringing food and friends together on a Macomb farm

By Jane Carlson



Three miles west of Western Illinois University on a stretch of Adams Street, John Curtis is at work in all seasons planting and tending to a colorful, edible landscape that feeds hundreds of mouths in the Macomb, Ill., area each year.

His market garden, Barefoot Gardens, symbolizes his commitment to being a good steward of the land. It's a gentle, attentive and cooperative approach to growing food by treading lightly in nature, an interest that was sparked for Curtis more than 20 years ago during his time as a Peace Corps volunteer in the Dominican Republic, where he assisted with a model farm project.

"I fell in love with walking out into the landscape and finding food," he says.

Family connections drew Curtis and his wife, Karen Mauldin-Curtis, back to the Macomb area about 15 years ago. Barefoot Gardens is built on the three acres he now tends three miles west of Macomb.

At first he grew produce and sold at farmers' markets, but he felt like he spent too much time harvesting and not as much time growing as he would like. Plus, the unpredictability of demand at the farmers' markets created too much waste in some cases and a shortage in others.

Having heard about CSAs, he soon shifted in that direction. In its first year in 2003, Barefoot Gardens had 20 shares and the growing season ran from June 1 to Sept. 20. In 2013, there are 65 shares and the growing season goes from May 1 to Dec. 31.

The extended growing season is made possible by two hoop houses added to the property within the last few years — paid for, in part, by a capital campaign supported by Barefoot Gardens' loyal shareholders — and also by a growing philosophy that bucks the habit of putting in the garden in spring, and ripping it out in the fall.

For Curtis, there's more than one planting season each year. "To me, fall is like the second spring," he says.

By July, he's planting again — putting in another round of crops to replace what's already been harvested, and in winter, he's harvesting carrots so sweet and crisp they shatter if they hit the pavement.

Sharing the fruits (and fun) of the harvest

Initially, Barefoot Gardens followed the model of most CSAs, in that the growers harvested the produce, herbs, berries and flowers, and filled baskets for shareholders to pick up. In the first years, they even offered delivery.

But what Curtis soon realized, especially for the delivery customers, was this kind of arrangement denies people the chance to experience what got him involved in growing food in the first place — walking out into the landscape and finding food.

So, at Barefoot Gardens, shareholders do the majority of the harvesting. On Monday nights, a covered porch area becomes a place for socializing, sipping wine, nibbling appetizers and sharing recipes before customers head out into the gardens to pick what they want with their own hands. They bring baskets, coolers, Ziploc bags, knives and pruning scissors — and they get their hands dirty, literally, gathering their own food.

"It's very social. I've heard people talk about it as a 'third place,'" Curtis says,

referring to the concept of a place separate from the home or the workplace beneficial for socializing.

While Curtis does harvest some things to avoid waste or damage, having his customers do the picking for the most part decreases his workload while it increases people's connections to the landscape and the food.

A thoughtful planting strategy

Curtis knows his customers well, from the hot-pepper fanatics to the beet lovers, and he's able to grow what they want in the quantities they'll want it, then plant something else once it has been harvested to provide a greater variety throughout the growing season — and to keep things interesting for shareholders.

Popular items — such as herbs and kale and Sungold cherry tomatoes — are strategically planted where shareholders can get to them first. Curved garden rows and a constantly changing and evolving list of crops hint at Curtis' creativity and his passion for what he prefers to call edible landscaping instead of gardening or farming.

Over the course of the growing season, he'll grow a large variety of greens, vegetables, cut flowers and herbs, as well as blackberries, blueberries, raspberries and strawberries. Deer-resistant crops are planted on newly cultivated tiered plots, with other plants safely growing inside the hoop houses or behind fences in beautifully landscaped beds.

John Curtis (middle) and some of the produce grown at Barefoot Gardens for CSA customers (left). (Submitted)

Curtis says there is a very vibrant local food scene in Macomb. Faculty at Western Illinois University are teaching courses about local food movements and the economics of modern agriculture, and younger families are paying more and more attention to where their food comes from. Adding to that vibrant scene are a series of gardening workshops that Curtis now teaches each spring.

Likewise, Curtis' work with the Illinois Stewardship Alliance is helping to develop a vision for the future of Illinois' agriculture in which legislation supports and encourages family farmers, food entrepreneurs and operations large and small that protect rather than exploit natural resources.

"It evens that playing field a little bit," he says of the ISA's work.

Jane Carlson is a frequent Radish contributor. Barefoot Gardens, 3201 W. Adams St., Macomb, is still accepting CSA memberships for the 2013 fall extension. Visit the website at barefootgardens.org for more information.

Worth its salt

Easy, flavorful salts to liven up your summer dishes

By Leslie Klipsch

Salt has been used for thousands of years both to preserve food and add flavor to favorite dishes. Recently, though, I've observed a trend meant to please our increasingly gourmet palettes: freshening up the standard taste of sea or rock salt by infusing it with even more flavor. The process to make these seasoned salts couldn't be easier — just combine equal parts salt and seasonings — and the combinations are limited only by your imagination: A creative cook might combine saffron with salt to stretch its pleasure; tea leaves for an earthy element; or lime zest for a pleasant punch.

Finishing salt — the salt you add to a dish before it's served — can make a dramatic difference in how your food tastes. Flavored finishing salts liven things up even more, adding an unexpected touch to the simplest summer dishes.

With dreams of enhancing the fresh flavor of my grilled sweet corn and just-plucked-from-the-garden tomato slices, I recently gathered ½ cup of packed, fresh basil and ½ cup of kosher salt, then pulsed them together in my food processor. As with all flavored salts, you can spread the resulting herbed salt on a baking sheet and then leave it to dry for a few days in the open air, or you can opt to speed up the process by baking the combination in an oven heated to 225 degrees or so.

I chose the latter method. It took about 45 minutes to dry the basil salt (with some stirring halfway through), and all the while the kitchen filled with the most amazing smell. After letting it cool, I pulsed the crumbly mixture once again in the food processor and transferred it to an airtight container for storage. The food processor produces fine salt; for a more textured finish, use a mortar and pestle or even a strong, sealed plastic bag and a rolling pin.

Citrus salt is just as simple. Finely grate the peel of a lemon and an orange (each yields around 2 tablespoons of zest), spread it out on a baking sheet and let it dry for several days. When the zest is dry, combine it with an equal amount of sea or kosher salt and give it a whirl in the food processor or crush it with a mortar and pestle. The finished product is especially nice for flavoring the rim of a frosty cocktail glass.

Gary Krambeck / Radish

To take citrus salts to the next level, orange, lemon or lime peels can be combined with herbs like rosemary. Equal parts dried lemon zest, dried rosemary, and sea salt tastes great on grilled shrimp skewers and roasted vegetables. Think lime-chile, orange-sage, or lemon-fennel. Not only will a little experimentation bring an additional layer of flavor to your table, but flavored salts are another great way to preserve your summer garden's abundant crop of herbs for the months ahead.

Because I was on a roll in my artisanal salt production and because my husband loves the spicy punch of Sriracha, the hot Thai chili condiment, I searched for and found a recipe for Sriracha salt in "The Sriracha Cookbook" by Randy Clemens. Following the recipe, I mixed ½ cup kosher salt with 5 teaspoons of Sriracha in a small bowl and then spread the mixture thinly on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper. It took a couple of days for the combination to slowly dry and I stirred it occasionally during the process. (In a pinch, as with other recipes, I could have let it dry in an oven set at 225 degrees or so.) Now stored in an airtight container in our spice cupboard, the Sriracha salt has proven itself to be a versatile condiment. My husband happily shakes the spicy salt onto eggs, pasta and even pizza.

Flavored salts are simple to make and pack a powerful punch, adding a vivid touch of flavor to your everyday dishes. You can store your salts in an airtight container of any kind, but I've found that putting it in a pretty package makes a nice, edible gift for foodie friends. Imagine the delight of your hosts when you present them with their own tin of herbed salt at the next backyard cookout.

Leslie Klipsch is a frequent Radish contributor. Tweet your own seasoned salt combinations at #RadishRecipes.

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Move, stretch, hope

Delay the Disease class can help those with Parkinson's

By Annie L. Scholl

Kris Cameron has a personal reason for offering "Delay the Disease," an exercise class for people with Parkinson's disease: Her father, who died of the disease in 2003.

A certified personal trainer and owner of ReNu Your Life Personal Training based in Iowa City, Cameron says her father "had a very strong personality and was a Marine in World War II. However, when the disease started to progress, instead of trying to stay as active as possible and fight it, I think he just gave up and let it take over. He didn't live very long after the diagnosis."

Through Delay the Disease, which she teaches at the Iowa City Senior Center, Cameron wants to give people what her father didn't have: hope. "I want to help them stay as active as possible," she adds. The class is ongoing and is offered on Sundays from 12:45-1:45 p.m. The cost is $5.

Parkinson's disease is a chronic and progressive movement disorder, which means symptoms worsen over time. According to the Parkinson's Disease Foundation's website, pdf.org, nearly 1 million people in the United States are living with the disease. The cause is unknown and there is no cure, though treatment options, such as medication and surgery, help to manage symptoms.

Dottie Armens, 69, of Iowa City, was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease about six years ago. A retired nurse in the orthopedic department at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics, Armens began taking Cameron's class in September 2012.

"I believe that exercise is extremely important to help with the symptoms of Parkinson's disease," she says. "It helps relieve my stiffness and movement problems associated with the disease. It is fun to exercise in a group setting and much more motivating than going it on my own."

She also enjoys talking with other people in the class. "We can share some of our mutual problems and challenges," says Armens.

In addition to Cameron's class, Armens also takes a dance class for people with Parkinson's, a yoga class and a writing class. "All of these activities help me feel better," she says. "I think the key to fighting the disease is to keep as active as possible."

Cameron believes exercise is beneficial for all sorts of conditions, but she's especially excited about the effects it has on Parkinson's. She's met people who have lived with the disease for 20 years.

Cameron, who has been a personal trainer specializing in working with older adults with chronic conditions for more than 15 years, says she was attracted to the Delay the Disease program because it is medically based and has the support of physicians and physical therapists. She also loves the energy of founders David Zid and Jackie Russell, with whom she trained at the Great River Medical Center in Burlington, Iowa.

Personal trainer Kris Cameron leads participants through a series of exercises in her Delay the Disease class at the Iowa City Senior Center. (Submitted)

The exercise program involves stretching, balance and muscle strengthening. "We also work on specific exercises for Parkinson's, such as hand exercises, posture, walking/gait, arm swing, facial exercises and voice projection," Cameron adds.

She tailors the class to the specific difficulties her participants are having. If, for example, they're having difficulty getting in and out of a vehicle, she focuses the class on sit-to-stand exercises.

While many people are skeptical and/or intimidated about attending the class, Cameron says once they come to class, they like the supportive environment and even have fun. "It's definitely good for the soul," she says, adding that besides the physical benefits of exercise, participants experience greater confidence in their abilities, camaraderie and socialization.

"We laugh and joke around and sometimes even sing," Cameron says. "I hope to lift them up emotionally and mentally."

Annie L. Scholl is a frequent Radish contributor. A longer version of this story is available at radishmagazine.com. For more information on Kris Cameron and her fitness classes, visit renuyourlife.com.

Exploring Milan

By Radish staff

On May 31, local volunteers and more than two dozen scientists and naturalists from around the Midwest converged in southwest Rock Island. They were there for a BioBlitz, an intensive exercise in finding and identifying as many plant and animal species as possible within a given area — in this case, the Milan Bottoms, an ecologically-rich 92 acres comprised of floodplain forest and wetlands owned by the Natural Land Institute. During the 24-hour event, writers from Radish, The Dispatch and The Rock Island Argus contributed reports from the field. For their full reports, and a video taken at the event, visit radishmagazine.com.

Bottoms

3 p.m. Friday: *Looking for critters great and small*

Dr. Sam Heads, an entomologist with the Illinois Natural History Survey of the University of Illinois, darted into a field with a sweep net and deftly scooped up the first species of the day: a monarch butterfly.

"It's a male," he said, gently parting the wings and pointing to pheromone patches on the wings.

Within two hours, the insect team had netted and identified another first — a tiny American copper butterfly, never before recorded in Rock Island County.

Meanwhile, Ann Sullivan of the Wildland Trust and Bob Clevenstine of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Rock Island carried a laundry basket of live traps to the edge of the forest in hopes of catching a few small mammals.

"We're assuming the animals will be trying to avoid water, too," explained Sullivan as they searched for

patches of dry ground on which to set the traps.

"I'm personally also trying to avoid poison ivy," quipped Clevenstine.

— Sarah J. Gardner

8 p.m. Friday: *Guided nature tours for the public*

Anthony McCracken, of Milan, said he has driven by the Bottoms countless times and has always wondered what plant and animal life call the Milan Bottoms home.

When a neighbor tipped him off that the restricted-access preserve would be open to the public during the BioBlitz, he jumped at the opportunity to scope out the area.

"I just like going out in the woods," McCracken said on the guided wildlife tour. A mushroom hunter, he simply enjoys being outdoors, he added. "I like to hear the sounds at night."

The tour weaved through shallow water and tall grass back to the main research tent, where biologists were hard at work, labeling and classifying the many specimens collected earlier in the day. By 9:30 p.m., most of the general public had cleared out.

— Kevin Smith

Midnight Friday: *The flooded forest by canoe*

Hundreds of minnows, tiny, slender and teardrop-shaped, flitted and flickered about in the light of our headlamps on errands of their own. Below them was a crayfish that would have seemed graceful if seen alone, but among the fish, appeared slow and creeping. Above them all briefly appeared two black water beetles, neither larger than two match heads put together. They glided swiftly through the light, crossing paths to make an "x" before disappearing again.

There were long, tiny trails on some of the trees we passed. They glittered in our headlamps. I presume they were the work of snails or slugs, though I saw none.

Several floating logs, more rotten than the others, had sprouted miniature forests of leafy green plants. They looked like the tiny islands.

During our return to camp we saw a green glow in the grass. When event organizer Eric Anderson picked it up, we found it was a tiny canoe-shaped bug. Its body was divided into segments, similar to a pill bug, and it moved on delicate, almost invisible legs. Its head was at one end, and the glow at the other. None of us had seen one before, so we took it back to camp for the collection, where it was identified as a female glow worm.

— Anthony Watt

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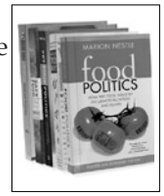

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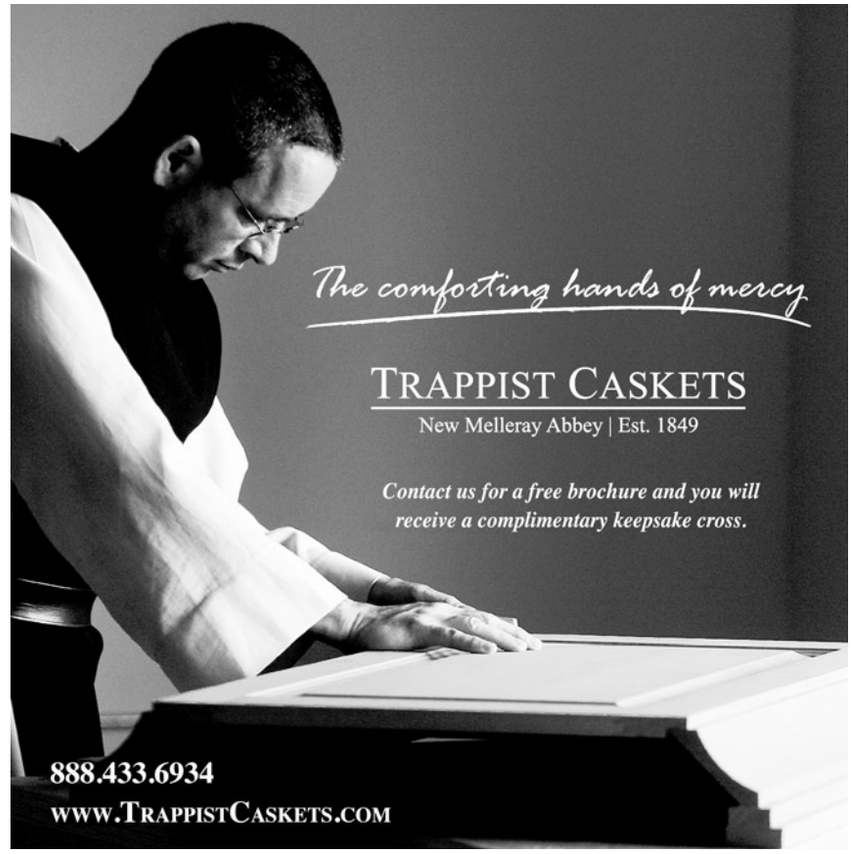

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5 a.m. Saturday: *An early-morning birding excursion*

As dawn broke, people slowly emerged from parked cars or arrived from hotel rooms. ("Hotel scientists" some called them in joking fashion.) Either way, they all shared the ritual of bathing themselves in a cloud of bug spray.

Soon enough a collection of about 15 scientists, naturalists and amateur photographers had gathered for the morning's bird-watch trek. The group resembled a ragtag militia with everybody clad in uniforms of khaki and knee-high boots, armed with binoculars or cameras draped around their necks. The brigade split into two groups, and our group headed west.

Mike Klag, Ralph Weiss from Muscatine, and Tim Murphy from Moline stopped every few minutes along the trail to look and listen — and to swat away the constant cloud of gnats forming around our heads.

Weiss and Murphy identified different species, while Klag recorded the results on a clipboard. When we hit a trail that followed the overhead power lines north to the Mississippi River, Murphy, thinking he had heard an American redstart, stopped the group.

He instructed people to spread out to look for the bird. "Some birds respond to pishing," he said as he cupped his hands around his mouth making a sound that resembled a loud whisper. "Pssst." No luck.

As we followed the power lines, Murphy stopped to point out birds. Resembling a confused clock, his arms darted in different directions, pointing out birds and their sounds. Right arm at 2 o'clock pointed at a red-bellied woodpecker. Left arm at 9 o'clock signaled a chickadee call. Right arm at 4 o'clock indicated an indigo bunting.

As Klag recorded the sightings, Murphy explained how complex birdcalls can be. He recalled a Cornell University study that reported 22 different variations of a titmouse call.

— Spencer Rabe

10 a.m. Saturday: *Unexpected absences and finds*

Western Illinois entomology instructor Ken McCravy said it was "kind of weird" not to see any robber flies, which perch on vegetation and then use their really strong legs to fly out and grab other insects, then use a beak-like structure to suck body fluids.

"It's pretty high up on the food chain, a good indicator species of what other species are present," he said. "It's strange that they're not here. I don't know. Maybe they're just kind of skittish. Too many people around."

Later, herpetologist Mik Holgersson's look of excitement couldn't be mistaken. He had a big find, a diamondback water snake. "I've never seen one of these personally until today," he said, adding, "It's the first I've positively ID'd as far as 'it's not a northern water snake.'"

He was in a kayak and saw the snake on a log. He took pictures first, then stuck his paddle out and managed to lift the snake directly into a small net. "It was luck," he said. Other snakes found were plain garters and common garters.

Meanwhile, observers weren't sure if a barred owl found in the grass along the trail was injured or not, but visitors were getting within a couple feet of it while taking pictures. Sean Georgi of Augustana College's biology department said he'd noted the owl's location in case someone wanted to return later to check on it. It was later determined to be a fledgling and should be fine, according to Eric Anderson, event organizer.

— Lisa Hammer

2 p.m. Saturday: *The final push*

Shad. Carp. Largemouth bass. Longnose gar. Shorthead redhorse. With a practiced hand and an expert eye, Karen Rivera pulled wriggling fish one by one from a large tub of water and called out their names. Then she laid them on a board to measure their length, scooped them onto a scale to weigh them, and plopped them into another container of water to be returned to the river.

Rivera, a biologist with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, was assisted by Nick Anderson, an intern with the Illinois Natural History Survey, who scribbled down the names and numbers as Rivera called them out.

Both were perched on a boat that had been pulled on a trailer right from the river to the edge of the main tent where, in the final hours of the BioBlitz, the scientists and naturalists were working furiously to sort, identify and catalog as many species as possible before the event ended.

As the 3 p.m. deadline approached, all eyes turned to Angella Moorehouse of the Illinois Nature Preserve Commission, who was charged with adding up the data. One survey boat remained out on the river, caught on some driftwood. Moorehouse, cell phone perched on her shoulder, typed their results into a computer so they could be included in the final tally.

When she was finished, she stood up and came to the tent center, grinning broadly. The River Bend Wildland Trust, which had organized the BioBlitz, had hoped 500 species would be cataloged during the event. In fact, 740 had been identified in the field, with hundreds more collected to be identified later in the lab.

— Sarah J. Gardner

Sarah J. Gardner and Spencer Rabe from Radish magazine, Kevin Smith and Anthony Watt from The Dispatch and The Rock Island Argus, and correspondent Lisa Hammer worked in shifts to cover the BioBlitz. For more information about the River Bend Wildland Trust, visit rbwt.org.

24 hours
740 species

The final tally surpassed the organizers' goal of finding 500 species: the field count included 415 insects, 173 plants, 60 birds, 30 spiders, 29 aquatic invertebrates, 20 fish, and 13 reptiles.

Pick the purslane

Common weed actually is a nutritional powerhouse

By Sarah J. Gardner

Chances are you know what purslane is even if you don't know it by that name. A hardy and opportunistic weed, it has thick, reddish stems, somewhat plump tear-drop shaped leaves, and it grows low to the ground almost anywhere it can. In the cracks of sidewalks. Along fences and curbs. In gardens and lawns and vacant lots.

Not only is it widespread, it has a large number of alternate names: pigweed, pusley, mother-of-millions … none of which, it is fair to say, sound appetizing. So it is understandable if, assuming you have thought about it at all, the most attention you have given purslane is how to get rid of it.

How about with a fork? As it turns out, purslane is a uniquely nutritious vegetable, one that is free for the taking, right at your feet. This humble, low-growing plant contains more omega-3 fatty acids than any other Midwestern food source, rivaling even some fish oils with the heart-healthy nutrient. It also is a rich source of vitamin A and C, and one study reported in the Journal of the American College of Nutrition found it to contain seven times as much vitamin E as spinach.

The succulent leaves with their perky sweet-and-sour taste are a prized ingredient in other countries, such as the plant's country of origin, India, where purslane is cooked in spicy curry dishes. In France it is a popular addition to summer soups, which it not only flavors but thickens. In the U.S., raw purslane is most often served as part of a salad. Simply chop the stems and leaves and add them to a lettuce mix or — even better — a potato salad, where the somewhat viscous texture of purslane compliments the creamy dressing.

For me, though, the best way to eat purslane is pickled. I say this even though three pints of pickled purslane sat in my larder last year, untouched for months. I can see them even now, tucked back among the cheery quarts of tomatoes and rosy-hued jars of jam, a culinary question mark on my shelf. Although I like to think I'm an adventurous eater, I will admit after enthusiastically cooking up a batch of pickled purslane, I initially lost some of my zeal to eat it. The pickling process does nothing to make purslane pretty — in truth, it looks like jarred seaweed — but man, oh man, what it does for the flavor and texture!

When I finally worked up the courage to crack open a jar, I was immediately rewarded for my derring-do with a versatile relish so pert and flavorful it rocketed to the top of my list of favorite sandwich toppings. I happily devoured the remaining jars in short order, deep in the heart of winter, when all those vitamins and nutrients were most welcome. Ever since, I've been eagerly awaiting the summertime return of this weed. Needless to say, far more than three jars of the relish will find their way onto my shelves this year.

Sarah J. Gardner is the editor of Radish.

Purslane Relish

3 pounds purslane (leaves and stems), gathered in a pesticide- and herbicide-free area
3 teaspoons allspice berries
3 tablespoons peppercorns
3-4 large cloves of garlic, peeled
1 lemon
3½ cups water
3½ cups apple cider vinegar
2 tablespoons coarse salt

Fill a large pot with water and bring to a boil. Have a large bowl of ice water nearby. Blanch the purslane by dropping it into the boiling water for 30 seconds, then remove it with a slotted spoon and drop it immediately into the ice water. Strain purslane from the water, roughly chop, and pack into clean, sterile 1-pint canning jars, leaving about 1-inch headspace at the top. Divide allspice berries, peppercorns, and garlic cloves equally among the jars. Using a vegetable peeler, peel long strips of lemon rind and place a strip in each of the jars.

Refill the pot with 3½ cups water, vinegar and salt. Bring to a rolling boil and stir to dissolve salt. Pour hot vinegar mixture over the purslane in the jars, completely submersing the vegetables. Seal the jars with canning lids and process for 10 minutes in a hot water bath. Cool and store jars. Allow flavors to meld for 3 weeks before opening. When ready to eat, remove purslane from liquid, discarding allspice berries and lemon peel. Use as a relish on sandwiches or serve on an antipasto plate.

Recipe adapted from "Hunt, Gather, Cook: Finding the Forgotten Feast" by Hank Shaw

iStockphoto

Compost 101

There's more than one way to get the job done

By Jeff Dick

There are a lot of reasons to try composting. Compost is nature's fertilizer, one free of potentially harmful chemicals. The raw materials — yard and kitchen waste — are easy to come by. And, in a bonus for the environment, composting cuts down on the amount of methane-emitting garbage put in landfills.

Of course, there are also a lot of different styles of compost bins, each requiring different amounts of space and effort. That can be intimidating if you are just starting out. How do you know which one is best for you?

+ First, the basics: To break down effectively, compost should be made up of about one-third "greens" (vegetable trimmings, fruit peelings, coffee grounds, lawn clippings, etc.) and two-thirds "browns" (paper towels, shredded newspaper, fallen leaves, sawdust, etc.). This effectively balances the amount of carbon to nitrogen in the mix.

After that, it's simply a matter of aerating the mix and maintaining adequate moisture levels to keep the decomposition process rolling along. Depending on the composting method and conditions (temperature, air, etc.), the composting process typically takes a few weeks to several months, but sometimes can take much longer. This is where the style of bin you choose can make a difference.

+ Holding units: Easy to maintain and convenient for, say, apartment residents with limited space, these units do not require "working," that is, periodically turning the compost with a shovel or pitchfork. However, that means little aeration, so the composting process takes longer — from six months to a year or more.

+ Portable bins: Similar to holding units, except they are transportable and allow for compost materials to be worked. Plastic units can be bought, or do-it-yourselfers can make a bin from chicken wire. Attaching four wooden pallets together to make a bin also works.

+ Turning units: Designed with aeration in mind, resulting in quicker compost production. Rotating structures such as barrel tumblers mitigate odor, which is usually the byproduct of inadequate aeration.

"What's great about a tumbler is that you turn the tumbler, not the compost," says Ed Peterson of Quad City Rain Barrels (qcrainbarrels.com), a home-based business in Moline. "It's a lot easier since you don't have to dig around."

Ed Peterson demonstrates use of one of his tumbler-style composters. (Photo by Paul Colletti / Radish)

Because the tumbling process expedites aeration, finished compost takes as little as a few weeks, says Peterson. "The tumbler is especially good for people who live in the city and may not have a lot of room for it. They can put them on a patio or deck or in a corner of the garage."

+ Heaps: An alternative to a bin structure, a compost heap is exactly what it sounds like. However, unenclosed food scraps may attract unwelcome pests. Manually turning a heap is necessary to expedite the composting process.

+ Trench composting: Another "bin-free" option, organic material is buried in holes about a half-foot to 1-foot deep, then covered with dirt. Decomposition takes up to 12 months, during which time not much else can be planted in the area.

+ Vermicomposting: A method that "feeds" kitchen and yard waste to a bin of worms (usually red wigglers, white worms or other species — not including common earthworms). The resulting worm casings are particularly nutrient heavy and contain fewer contaminants.

Vermicomposting requires a container along the lines of a large Rubbermaid tub, drilled with holes for aeration. Wetted newspaper strips provide a bed for added organics and suitable worms. Best kept away from direct outdoor sunlight and covered in damp burlap, vermicomposters thrive in a relatively cool, humid environment. Turning the mix is not necessary.

Jeff Dick is a regular Radish contributor. For more information, see urbanext.illinois.edu/compost, and for a detailed primer on composting, go to eartheasy.com/grow_compost.html.

Along the Wapsi

State park combines history with natural wonders

By Cindy Hadish

I have to admit, I'm a bit envious of Anamosa, Iowa, residents who have Wapsipinicon State Park in their backyard. Not only is the nearly 400-acre park serenely picturesque, but the site's history likely will be acknowledged with a listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

With a good friend from neighboring Stone City as my guide, I recently made the trip to check out the park. He smartly brought food — picnicking is one of many activities visitors enjoy — and a local's perspective for our trek through the park's highlights.

Wapsipinicon State Park was built in the 1920s using Anamosa State Penitentiary prison labor. Limestone entrances and arch bridges have survived floods and nine decades of Iowa weather, providing a glimpse back in time within the backdrop of hills and waterways.

The park grounds include a scenic nine-hole golf course. The Wapsipinicon Country Club's website notes that the clubhouse was built over three years. Foundation rock was taken from river bluffs and white oak logs were hauled with horse-drawn bobsleds in winter to build the structure, which dates back to 1924.

A nearby Rotary Lodge and Boy Scout Lodge can be rented for family reunions and other events. The park's 26 campsites — 14 with electrical hookups — offer restrooms and showers.

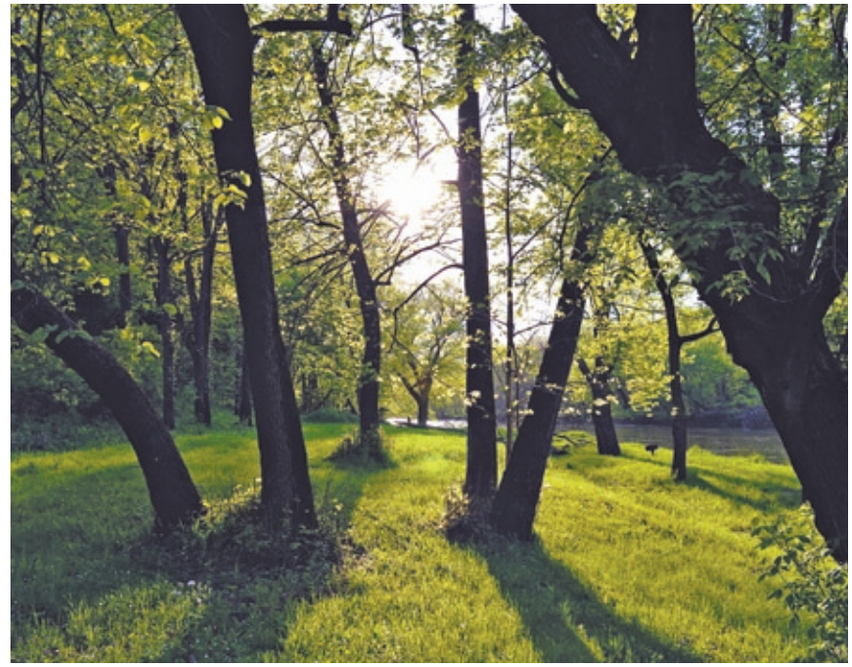
Two of the park's notable natural features are Horse Thief Cave and Ice Cave, both tucked into moss-dotted limestone bluffs. While I didn't see interpretive signs to explain the story behind the names, the logical explanation for Ice Cave's moniker is the ice-cold air inside the dark, narrow chamber. A flashlight would come in handy to see what's hiding in the cave's pitch-black recesses.

A short hike led up steps to the other, larger cave. From what I've read about the park's history, horse thieves used Horse Thief Cave as a camp in the 1850s, and in the distant past, it served as a shelter for prehistoric American Indian cultures.

I imagine that every season has its own beauty at Wapsipinicon State Park, but our late-spring visit particularly interested me, with Jack-in-the-Pulpit, mayapples and other wildflowers in bloom. Red and yellow columbine draped elegantly from bluffs, interspersed with delicate ferns. Park brochures note that visitors can harvest nuts and mushrooms.

More than three miles of multiuse trails are open to hiking, in-season cross country skiing and snowmobiling. We watched a mountain biker ride the steep hills of the white pine forest. At the park's high point, towering trees and a curving road offer one of the site's most scenic views, with the added bonus of aromatic scents of pines.

Thundering sounds of the hydro dam muffled calls of four geese that flew overhead as we walked across the 1887 steel truss bridge. Another park bridge attracted attention in 2006. The three-span, bowstring Hale Bridge, completed in 1879, was flown 15 miles to the park by two Chinook helicopters. Anglers regularly pull catfish, crappie and smallmouth bass from the river below.



A view of the riverbank within Wapsipinicon State Park. (Cindy Hadish / Radish)

With so many points of historical interest spread throughout the park, it's easy to see how the idea to secure a spot for the park on the National Register of Historic Places came about. Steps are currently being taken to nominate the park in 2014.

Rarely, if ever, are entire parks placed on the register, says Rose Rohr, chairwoman of the Jones County Historic Preservation Commission. More often, a bridge or other structure achieves that honor, Rohr says, but next year's nomination would place not only the park's limestone bridges and other amenities on the list, but archaeological and prehistoric features, along with the rest of the site. Even the park's "view shed" will be included in the nomination to help preserve those scenic vistas, says nomination consultant Leah Rogers of Tallgrass Historians.

Writer Cindy Hadish lives in Cedar Rapids. You can read more of her work at homegrowniowan.com. Wapsipinicon State Park, on County Road E-34 at the southwest edge of Anamosa, is open 4 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. daily. For more information, call 319-462-2761 or visit iowadnr.gov.

Flamingo Follies

The Wacky-Tacky Lawn Art Exhibit:

July 4 – August 1

The flock returns to the Quad City Botanical Center this summer. Area artists have artistically altered plastic pink lawn flamingos into works of art. The exhibit is open during regular Botanical Center hours. Join us for Flamingo Fun Family Programming every Sunday in July! Visit qcgardens.com for more information. *Ongoing event: Flamingo scavenger hunt with cool tropical prizes.

Admission fees: Adults - $6, Seniors (60+) - $5, Youth (5-12) - $4, Kids (2-4) - $2. Members and children under 2 are always free.

Friday, August 2, 2013 - Flamingo Fling (art auction and summer party)
Doors open at 6:00pm – auction starts at 7:00.
Cost $15.00 per adult guest / kids 15 years and under $10.00.
The very same flamingos that have been on exhibit in the gardens of the Botanical Center for the month of July will be auctioned off at the Flamingo Fling Friday, August 2 featuring a live art auction and entertainment. The tropical party includes: live band, live auction, cash bar, light appetizers, best dressed flamingo guest, raffle and much more.

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Five for fitness

Simple, versatile exercises to practice anywhere

By Neal Turner

Fitness can come in many forms. Typically, the picture most often in our minds is of overcrowded facilities where people are doing just about every exercise imaginable. Or maybe we associate it with a piece of fitness equipment purchased from the 3 a.m. infomercial, or even one of those fitness classes where the instructor is moving so quickly you think, "She can't be human!" Well, the nice thing is it doesn't have to be this way.

The truth is a well-rounded fitness routine can be built around basic maneuvers like squats, push-ups and lunges that can be used to build strength, balance, stability and cardiovascular health.

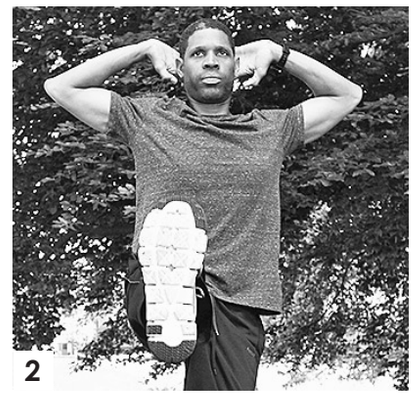
Their advantages are many. They are inexpensive and can be performed virtually anywhere, indoors or out. And such exercises have functional benefits, making everyday tasks like yard work, washing the car, or cleaning the house more manageable by strengthening the muscles needed to lift, carry and move through a full range of motion.

The trick is doing them correctly. Once the basic techniques are mastered, the intensity of the workout can be adjusted, either by holding the exercise in a static pose, performing the exercises at a slower or more rapid tempo, or increasing the number of sets done in a single workout. Here are five basic exercises to get started.

Fitness professional Neal Turner makes his Radish debut this month.

1. Squats. Begin by standing with feet spread slightly wider apart than the shoulders. Keeping your gaze forward, bend the hips and knees to lower the upper body. Stand back up. Repeat. *Tip: Keeping you gaze forward helps keep your head and chest "lifted," which keeps your back straight. Be mindful not to push the knees out past the toes.*

2. Standing forward leg raise. Begin in a standing position with the legs together. Raise one leg off the ground to hip height. As you do so, keep the leg straight, point the toes upward, and tighten the muscles in your thigh. Lower the leg and repeat 8-10 times before switching to the other leg. *Tip: As you lower your leg, opt for keeping the foot slightly elevated, not touching it to the ground until you have completed all your repetitions.*



Todd Welvaert / Radish

3. Push ups. Begin with your hands and toes on the ground, arms fully extended and back straight. Your legs can be straight or your knees can be bent and touching the ground. Bend your elbows outward as you lower your chest to the floor, stopping at the point where your shoulders are even with your elbows, then straighten your arms to push yourself back up. Repeat. *Tip: Try to raise your torso as one unit, your shoulders and hips aligned, rather than allowing your hips to dip as you come back up.*

4. Plank. Begin in a position similar to a push up but with elbows bent to allow forearms to rest on the ground. Position elbows directly below your shoulders, keeping your hips in line with but not higher than your shoulders. Hold this position for several seconds, until you feel too fatigued to maintain the position. *Tip: Focus on "pulling" your belly button in toward your spine as you hold the position to engage the core muscles.*

5. Static lunge. Begin in a standing position. Step one foot forward and bend both knees, lowering the back knee toward (but not all the way down to) the ground. Keep your upper body erect and gaze looking straight ahead. Return to a standing position by pushing off from the front foot. Repeat with the opposite foot. *Tip: Be careful not to extend your forward knee beyond the middle toe of the forward foot. When lowering your back knee parallel to the ground, the upper and lower leg form a 90-degree angle.*

Get creative and have fun! You can group these exercises together in any order, performing one or two sets of 8-10 reps for the beginner, or multiple sets and as many 15-20 reps for more advanced exercise.

To see a video demonstrating each of these exercises from start to finish, visit radishmagazine.com.

Right on track

Families find fun racing BMX bikes in East Moline

By Roger Ruthhart

For the first time in memory, the largest BMX bicycle racing group in Illinois is the one in East Moline. Through word of mouth, and with a little help from television, the number of kids and adults in the area who are racing their bicycles each week is now more than 100, according to Paul DePauw, who manages the East Moline BMX track and runs BMX Racing Zone bike shop.

As a result of its success, East Moline BMX this year will host the BMX Nationals, July 19-21, as well as the State Championships, Sept. 22. The nationals are expected to bring more than 1,000 riders to town and the state meet about 350.

What's the attraction? The X Games and other BMX racing on television provide exposure. But DePauw thinks the biggest attraction is that it's an individual sport. "We promote it with the saying 'Nobody sits on the bench,' and that seems to be a big selling point," he says.

He says the sport also provides a good family atmosphere. DePauw says some of his best memories growing up are of traveling to different tracks for races with his family. Plus, the sport provides good action, is exciting, and provides good exercise.

"Today, parents are trying to pull their kids off the Xbox. Back in the '80s (when he was young) it wasn't hard," DePauw says. "When we were kids we rode our bikes everywhere. Now there are so many choices. It's a different period, but we find once we get them out, they have a great time."

Ben Shoesmith of Hampton, Ill., says his son, Erick, had not shown much interest in sports but loved to ride his bike. Looking for opportunities to build on that interest, they discovered the Quad-Cities had one of the finest BMX facilities in the country. "We didn't have any gear. We just showed up. That night Paul had Erick out on the track on borrowed gear. This was the beginning of Erick's journey," says Shoesmith.

"BMX is an individual sport. You get out of it what you put into it. Erick has learned he can achieve whatever he sets his mind to achieve. It has built his confidence and self-esteem," his father explains.

Shoesmith also believes his son's experience has translated into success in the classroom. "Whereas the rewards of getting good grades in school are abstract and received far in the future, the rewards of BMX are immediate. He now instinctively understands that more points are better and can apply his motivation and focus to other aspects of his life," he says.

Rich Koch of Morrison has seen similar benefits for his son, Zed. They had no battles over Xbox (they don't own one), live on a 20-acre farm and watch little TV. "BMX is a nontraditional sport. A lot of dads play ball-and-stick types of sports with their kids because that's what they did as kids. I rode my bike 24/7 as a kid," says Koch. "I never pushed Zed into BMX. I have two older children who had no interest in BMX. They played ball sports and I supported that. But Zed was interested and now loves it."

A young participant takes to the track at the East Moline BMX track. (Photo by Gary Krambeck / Radish)

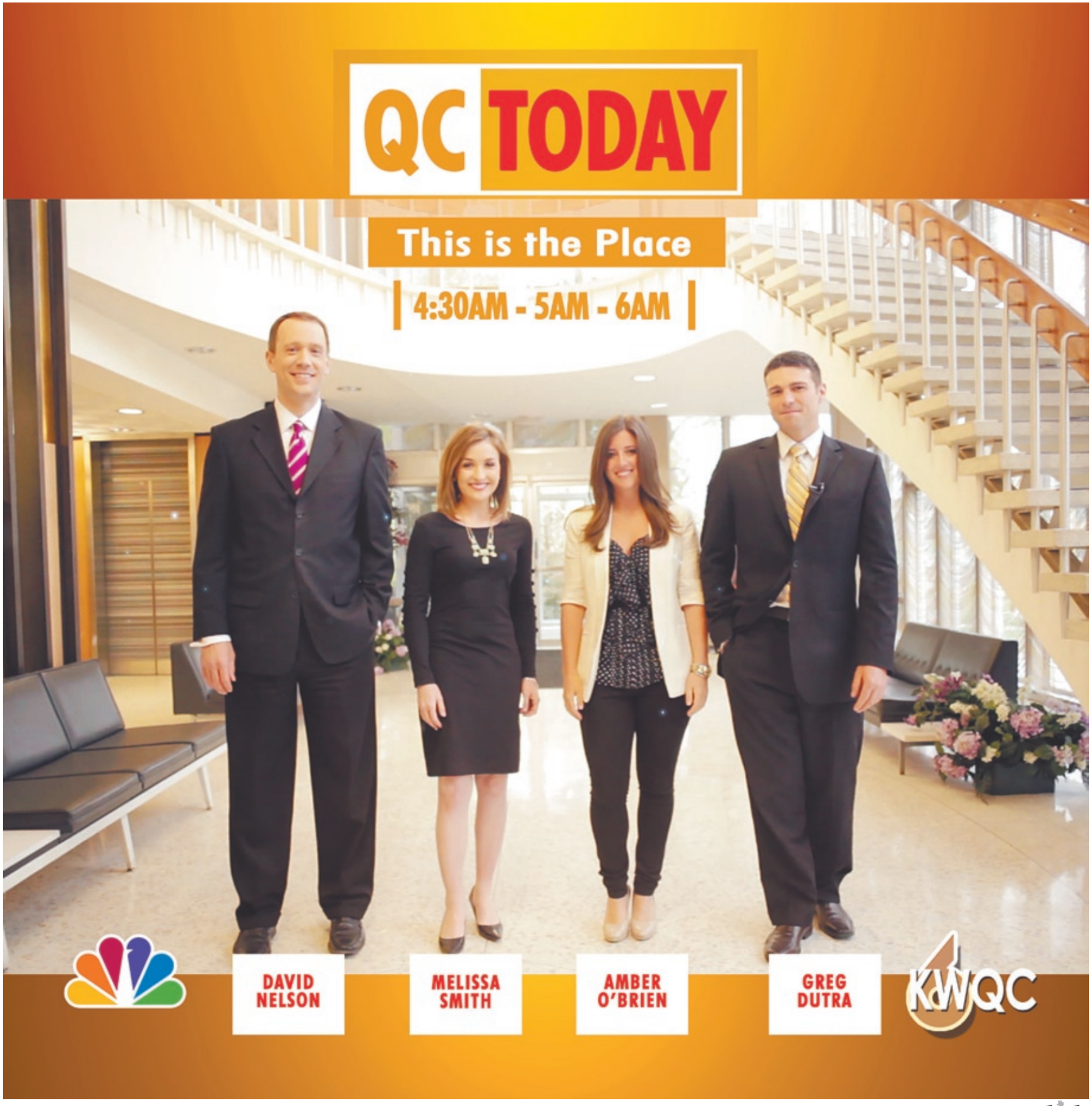
"With Zed's success he has became very confident. He remains humble but is sure of himself, which will carry on through life. He always likes to help new riders at the track just like his teammate helped him in the beginning," say Koch.

DePauw says BMX racing really started in the 1970s and became an official sport in the 1980s. "It's moved through the family since we started in 1993. Now there are brothers and sisters racing as well as dads. Veteran racers are coming back and I don't have to sell them. And us 40-year vets are pretty competitive," he says.

The local group also has rejuvenated indoor racing during the winter at the QCCA Expo Center in Rock Island, which allows racers to compete year round.

"It's a great alternative youth activity. With it being an Olympic sport and colleges starting to offer scholarship opportunities and the family aspect, BMX racing seems to be primed for growth," says DePauw.

Roger Ruthhart makes his Radish debut this month. For more information about the East Moline BMX track, visit eastmolinebmx.net.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food for thought

Up with the sun

Trading night-owl habits for the rewards of early rising

By Julie Barton

To say I'm not a morning person is a bit of an understatement. I spent a fortune on a coffee maker with a timer so I can sleep 10 extra minutes while my morning java brews. My first mug was the iconic Snoopy "I think I'm allergic to mornings" cup, given to me by my parents for my tender 10th birthday. My kids know I will go to the mattresses — literally — to sleep in on the weekend.

This winter, I was in a bit of a rut. I wasn't getting nearly as much writing done as I'd like, my exercise level was nonexistent, and the morning school/work rush was becoming increasingly harried in my home. I tried the "push the snooze" method of fulfillment, but surprisingly, that just made things worse.

Perhaps it isn't coincidence that author Jon Acuff was the keynote speaker at a conference I attended in March, right about the same time daylight-saving time started. In his presentation, he recommended early rising. He actually suggested that people wake up at 5 a.m., but I assumed he was kidding and chose to ignore that part. I'm not a sadist, after all.

On the flight home, I read his book, "Start: Punch Fear in the Face, Escape Average and Do Work that Matters," which reinforces the idea of waking earlier. Acuff doesn't say you should lose an hour of sleep; he argues that productive time is more likely to happen in the morning hours rather than in the evening. I decided to try it.

I set my alarm for 5 a.m., proving that I'm more of sadist than I thought. That first morning was so hard. I got out of bed, lumbered to my coffee pot and stared at it, unable to process the next step to get the coffee from the pot into my mouth. I did some writing, but most of it was probably about how tired I was. My kids got out the door without incident, and I made it to work, though, so there was some success.

On the second and third days, I was up for about 30 minutes, and then I went back to bed for an hour. I literally could not keep my eyes open. By the end of the week, I was pushing the snooze button again and not getting up until 6:30 a.m. My plan was clearly not working. Finally, I compromised and set my alarm for 5:30 a.m. So far, it's worked.

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Now, I get up with the sun. I drink my coffee while the world is getting lighter and brighter and the birds are waking up. The house is lovely and quiet. I sometimes turn on the radio and pack school lunches while sipping my coffee, instead of running around swearing about how we're late. I feel more — dare I say it — organized and in control.

A lifelong night owl, I've always been convinced that I'm more creative in the witching hours, but I'm finding that the morning can be equally ripe for creative endeavors. As the world gets lighter, there is a feeling of possibilities. Morning is more like that first bite of cake, anticipating what will be. Nighttime, on the other hand, is the dutiful eating of the last bite of the cake on the plate. You know you shouldn't have it, but you make yourself power through.

So far, my new early-to-bed, early-to-rise approach has been an adjustment well worth my time. By simply waking up one hour earlier each day, only on weekdays, I'm adding 260 hours of quality time to my year. I'm not saying it's always productive time, but it's certainly time I've claimed just for me, and I am more awake because of it.

Julie Barton is a regular contributor to Radish. Read more of her musings at adayinthewife.com.

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Cash awards

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Questions may be sent to racedirector@lakegeodechallenge.com, or visit **www.lakegeodechallenge.org** for more information.