



## THE BRENTON ARBORETUM

# NEWSLETTER, AUTUMN 2021

### COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS - Melissa Burdick, Executive Director

My grandmother always said “count your blessings.” This was her way of reminding us that you should always carry a spirit of gratitude in your heart. I confess, sometimes when I’m crunching budget numbers or scrutinizing fundraising performance, I can lose sight of what those numbers really represent. Each donation is a little piece of the heart and soul of someone who cares. Whether it’s a gift of a few coins from a child’s piggy bank or a big check from an affluent charitable fund—each gift is thoughtful, meaningful, and precious.

The Brenton Arboretum is blessed with a caring community of members and donors who give generously to support our collections, landscape, and work. We keep needing to add pages to our donor list (see page 3 of this newsletter) just to keep up with our growing family of contributors! Our donors show us every day that the Arboretum is loved and valued. As much as our donors treasure The Brenton Arboretum; we treasure you. When we count our blessings, you’re one of them. We simply can’t say it enough: *thank you.*



### NEW WAYS OF GIVING HELP OAK LEAF CIRCLE GROW

- Melissa Burdick, Executive Director

Since its inception in 2018, The Brenton Arboretum’s Oak Leaf Circle of Donors has seen steady growth, it now includes more than 110 individuals or households! The Oak Leaf Circle encompasses donors whose giving in a year totals \$500 or more.

You might think that Oak Leaf donors tend to make single, large donations. In reality, though, many donors prefer to give several small donations throughout the year with our monthly auto-recurring donation program. Other donors double the impact of their gifts by signing up for their employer’s charitable matching program. Some savvy supporters are starting to pay closer attention to new tax laws and benefits associated with charitable donations made directly from investment accounts. These are just a few unique and clever ways to make your charitable dollars go farther for the causes you care about.

To learn more about auto-recurring donations or employer matching options, please reach out to me or Gail. When it comes to making charitable gifts as a tax strategy, we recommend speaking to an accountant who’s well versed on this complicated, ever-changing, and often overwhelming subject.

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### Brenton Arboretum Board Members

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## WHAT, THAT PLANT GROWS IN IOWA? - Andy Schmitz, Director of Horticulture

Back in September, I made a two-day, 30-road-hour, 672-mile whirlwind tour of far northeast Iowa, exploring wet marshes and high dolomite bluffs to collect seeds from Iowa native woody plants that only grow in this part of the state.

Why do these plants only grow here? This corner of Iowa is referred to as the Driftless Area because the last continental glacier passed it by 12,000 years ago, leaving the rolling hills, steep valleys, and limestone bluffs that provide micro habitats for rare plants, or at least rare-to-Iowa plants.

Iowa has only six native conifer species (or cone-bearing plants) and one of them is the common juniper, *Juniperus communis*. Clinging to the edge of a more than 50-foot cliff at Larkin Overlook in the Yellow River State Forest, common juniper is right at home growing on minimal soils at this dry and hot south-facing site. Though this species is only native in Iowa in Allamakee County, it actually has the largest geographical range of any woody plant, with a circumpolar distribution, according to Wikipedia.

An Iowa native plant that really shines this time of year is the winterberry, *Ilex verticillata*, covered with bright red fruits that attract birds and people alike. It is only known in a few Iowa locations along the northern part of the Wapsipinicon River where it grows in moist soils. The crimson fruits were beacons, probably the only reason I found it.

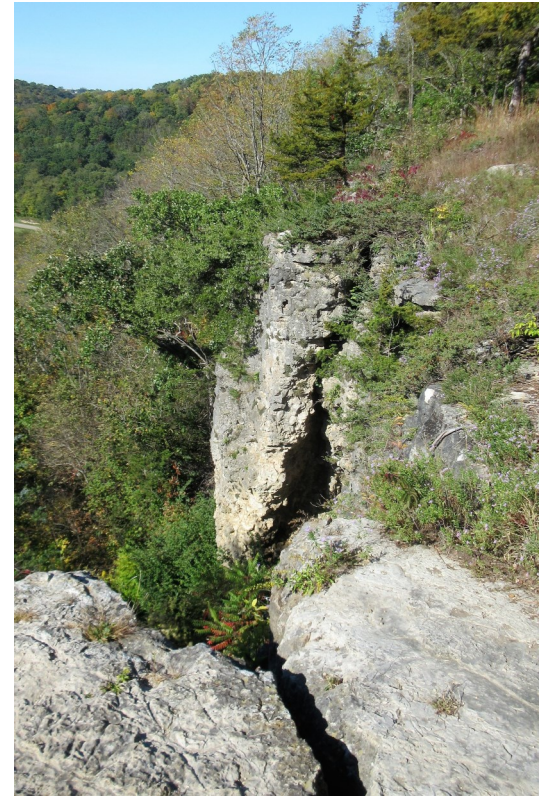
The mountain maple, *Acer spicatum*, is a small understory tree that prefers cool moist soils which northeast Iowa, with its



Winterberry in fruit

Arboretum as close to their native habitat as possible.

If climbing steep valleys or dangling over bluffs in northeast Iowa isn't on your to-do list this fall, come out to see these unique Iowa native plants at the Arboretum. The terrain isn't nearly as rugged as northeast Iowa, thanks to the last glacier.



Larkin Overlook in Yellow River State Forest

deep valleys, is able to provide.

This tree is a species of special concern for the state of Iowa because it's currently only known in two counties at four locations. Luckily for me, these populations have been well documented over the years or I'm not sure I would have ever found the few trees living in the thousands of acres of green forest.

Another of Iowa's rare plants is the balsam fir, *Abies balsamea*, which is only known in three locations in the state, growing on steep north-facing slopes where the soil is cool and moist. The Bluffton Fir Stand State Preserve, appropriately named, contains the largest population of balsam firs in the state. Every time I am near Bluffton, I have to drive by to see these firs standing like sentinels above the Upper Iowa River. Although I drove by the site on this trip, back in fall of 2014 I stopped to collect seeds and now small balsam fir trees have a new home at the Arboretum.

Will these species thrive or just survive at the Arboretum? Time will tell, but we will provide them with the best chance, planting them in the appropriate location at the

## THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS!



Oak Leaf Circle members donated cumulative gifts of \$500 or more during 2020; or between January 1 and July 31, 2021.

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*Donor list shows gifts received 8/1/20 through 7/31/21. We apologize for any unintentional error or omission. Call 515-992-4211, ext 2 so that we may correct our records.*

If you would like to make a memorial or tribute gift to the Arboretum, we have a variety of options ranging from bird boxes to benches. Contact Melissa at 515-992-4211 ext 3 if you would like to learn more!

## NEW NATURE CLUB FORMAT - Kelly Clime, Education & Outreach Manager

There continue to be bright spots in the education department amid the pandemic chaos. As we saw our homeschool numbers soar last year, we realized it was the perfect time to revitalize our Nature Club program.

For the past few years Nature Club has been a once-a-month program geared towards preschool kids aged 2 to 5, however this year Nature Club was expanded to accommodate a wider age range with the addition of Nature Club PLUS for school-aged kids. This expansion program was well attended for a first-year program, and the original Nature Club program for the younger kids was even better attended.

This year we've seen the best combined Nature Club attendance we've had in over five years, serving more than 150 children so far this year, many of whom are repeat attendees from one program to the next. This more than doubles our 2019 Nature Club numbers due in part to the age expansion, but also due to doing twice as many programs and moving to Thursdays from Fridays. Our once-a-month program is now offered two Thursdays a month creating double the opportunities for seasonal, thematic outdoor education.

We always look forward to seeing all our wonderful Nature Club families every few weeks, and we hope you'll join us when you can!



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## SPOTLIGHT ON VOLUNTEERS - Gail Turner, Membership & Volunteer Manager

We want to thank these generous volunteers, along with our volunteer Board of Directors listed on page 1, for donating more than 600 hours of their time and talents to the Arboretum during the past year:

John Bissell	Janet & Ed Freese	Steve & Marilyn Kofmehl	Patricia Prijatel
Michelle Book	Maureen Gilmore	Cheryl Lowe	Ronald W. Schulz
Sue Brenton	Teresa Hall	Stephen Loy	Beth Shields
Bennett Bright	Stacy & Marty Hart	Brian McLean	Craig Shives
David Burkett	Karen & Bob Henderson	Kay Meyer	Sydney Stewart
Chaney/Lewis Family	Rebecca Hillmer	Kelly Norris	Sara Thalacker
Edsen Family	Kim Holland	Kashish Patel	Colson Thayer
Phil Estaver	Joel Hooten	Aiden Payne	Joan Van Gorp
Chuck Fagen	Mark Kane	Doug Pfeiffer	Teresa Wichtendahl
Alison May Faulkner	Janell Ketelsen	Sydney Pottenbaum	Roger Winterhof
BJ Friederes	Robert King		



You may have seen John Bissell while visiting the Arboretum as he checks our bluebird boxes during nesting season. John has been tracking the activity in the boxes since 2009 and began leading bird walks for us a year later.

John's interest in birds began when he was a youngster, watching all of the birds at his grandparents' feeder in Greenfield, Iowa. He is a long-time member of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union and is currently on their rare bird records committee.

John monitors 20 bluebird boxes at the Arboretum. In a typical year, he finds bluebirds in about 40 percent of the boxes while the rest are homes to tree swallows and house wrens. John reports the numbers of bluebirds to the Arboretum for our records. He estimates he has seen more than 300 bluebirds fledge from those boxes since he began

volunteering. However, just as 2021 has been an odd year for people, it was also an unusual year for the bluebirds. John didn't find a single bluebird this year! The house wrens were in most of the boxes instead. Let's hope that was a one-time blip and the bluebirds return next year.

John looks forward to seeing you at his next bird walk—and we are grateful for his commitment to the birds and the Arboretum!



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## THE BRENTON ARBORETUM

25141 260th Street, Dallas Center, Iowa 50063

[www.thebrentonarboratum.org](http://www.thebrentonarboratum.org)

Return Service Requested

The ongoing pandemic hasn't stopped us from having lots of fun and educational classes this year. Mark your calendar for these events as we wrap up 2021.



Mystical Forest:  
A Haunted Drive-Through  
October 31; 2 to 5 pm



Nature Club &  
Nature Club PLUS  
November 4 & November 18;  
9 to 10 am & 10:30 to 11:30 am



Curbside Craft Kit:  
Gingerbread Houses  
December 4; Pick up  
between Noon and 2 pm



Light the Night  
December 21; 5:30 to 7:30 pm

Register for our classes at:  
[www.thebrentonarboratum.org](http://www.thebrentonarboratum.org)