

DYCK ARBORETUM OF THE PLAINS

PRAIRIE WINDOW

cultivating transformative relationships between people and the land

Fall 2024 Vol. 34 No. 3

Constructing a New Gathering Place

by Katie Schmidt, Grounds Manager and Horticulturist

Construction has begun in the Birdwatch Area on a new gazebo and paved sitting area. The previous structure in this area, a rustic pergola made of juniper posts from Marion County, was built by Scott Vogt in 2011, and was the site of many meet ups, restful pauses, and even marriage proposals. But the wood had deteriorated beyond repair, and a Sunday school class volunteered to take it down last fall.

The new structure will be an open-roof octagonal gazebo built by local craftsmen at Clydesdale Frames Co., using overstock material they had available from other projects.

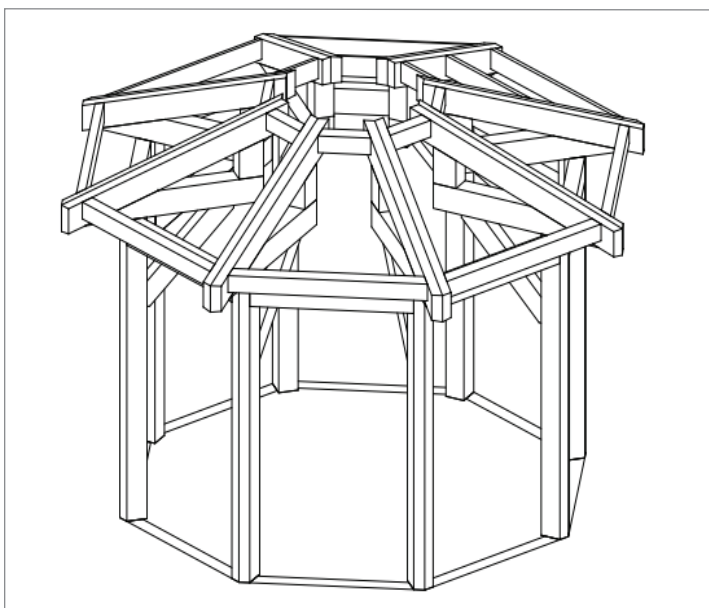
Native vines will be planted near the legs and encouraged to grow up to the roof to provide shade, but not so much that it blocks the view of the trees above. After all, this is an area dedicated to birdwatching!

The path leading to it will be paved, to allow access for wheelchairs and walkers. Completion of the project is

expected within the next two months. Once it is finished, the area will serve as a lovely place to hold outdoor meetings, small class sessions, or even very small weddings. We hope visitors will use it as a pit stop on their daily walk, and enjoy some quiet reflection amongst the sound of bird calls. It may even become a new lighted feature in our upcoming Prairie Lights event!

The construction process will no doubt take a toll on the surrounding garden, and require moving the large limestone edgers currently there. Next spring will bring a Birdwatch Area redesign, with new plantings. The area has suffered incursion from aggressive plants in recent years, and was sorely in need of a refresh.

Keep an eye out in the monthly email blasts about volunteer opportunities and stop by to check out the progress of this exciting new addition.



Left: A rendering of the octagonal gazebo that will be completed this fall in the Birdwatch Area. Below: Volunteers from the Genesis Sunday School class from Hesston Mennonite Church deconstructed the former gazebo in fall of 2023.



Networking with Oklahoma Native Plant Society

by Katie Schmidt, Grounds Manager and Horticulturist

Recently I was the keynote speaker for the Oklahoma Native Plant Network (ONPN) fall festival in Oklahoma City.



This is only the second year for this event, but I was impressed by the turnout and the variety of booths set up outside the presentation hall. I had to be quick in order to snag a few hard-to-find plants

for installation at the Arboretum, like white beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana* var. *lactea*) and blackfoot daisy (*Melampodium leucanthemum*).

My presentation centered on the use of native plants in urban spaces, including design principles and common pitfalls, and I was followed by representatives from Tulsa Botanic Garden, Bat Conservation International, and The Xerces Society. I had great opportunities to network

and chat with nurserymen, landscapers, designers, and hobbyists, all of whom were there to share their passion for native plants, habitat creation and conservation.

The next festival is September 2025, and I highly recommend it as a wonderful day trip for native plant enthusiasts looking to learn and shop! Be sure to follow ONPN on their social media channels to receive updates.

From the Director's Desk: A Tribute to Our Volunteers

by Scott Vogt, Executive Director and Horticulturist

Through the years, the Arboretum has benefitted from the time and talents of many volunteers. Today, we have on our team approximately one hundred selfless individuals who help us. Whether it is the grounds crew, the greenhouse crew, the office crew or the concert crew, the Arboretum staff are truly blessed to be surrounded and helped by so many good people.

When I first started working at the Arboretum, I was helped by a generous assistant, Cliff Bitikofer. Cliff has since passed on, but I am often reminded how he helped everyone he ever knew. He was a humble man who served us quietly, steadfastly, and effectively. At the Arboretum, he mowed, edged, pruned, cleaned up litter, built displays

for the plant sale, moved thousands of plants every year to and from the greenhouse, set up sculpture exhibits in the garden, and played his harmonica around the bonfire at the luminary stroll. Many days he gave the staff an impromptu melody just because he liked to cheer us on.

Cliff also loved to mow. Every Thursday morning he was here ready and willing to mow the entire Arboretum for us so it looked tidy for the weekend. When our mower broke down, Cliff brought his Zipper mower to the Arboretum and finished the season mowing the grounds for us with it. He even helped us purchase a new Excel mower so we were ready to go the next spring.

I will always think fondly of Cliff Bitikofer. He had a tender heart and a selfless spirit that I appreciated so much. Cliff set an example for so many who have followed him. The Arboretum benefits every day from so many people just like Cliff. We could not do what we do throughout the year without the help of so many of you. THANK YOU!

If you are interested in helping at the Arboretum, we have a place for you. We need help on the grounds, in the greenhouse, at events, in the gift shop, at concerts and so many different areas. Your talents are needed and we would love to connect with you. To get started, call us, email us or stop by for a visit, so we can welcome you to the volunteer crew.

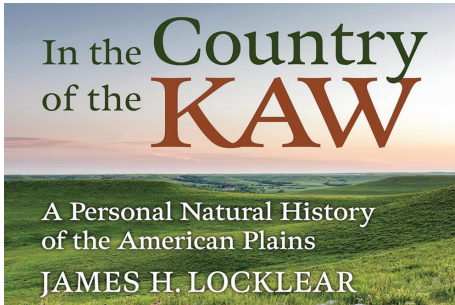


Photo by Brad Guhr

Arboretum board member and programming committee chair Kim Witt leads a bison tram tour at Maxwell Wildlife Refuge during our volunteer appreciation event on October 2nd.

2025 WINTER LECTURE SERIES

Stimulate your intellect and expand your horizons through our Winter Lecture Series in January, February and March. Featured topics for this coming series are the Kaw River watershed, bumble bee conservation, and bats in Kansas. Two lectures are in person and one will be remote. Lectures begin at 7:00 and end by 8:30 p.m. Cost is \$5 per person.



*Tuesday, January 28 (in person)
with Jim Locklear*

In the Country of the KAW: A Personal Natural History of the American Plains

Jim Locklear, former Director of the Dyck Arboretum, has written a book that celebrates the Kaw (Kansas) River watershed, from the High Plains of Colorado to its confluence with the Missouri River. His book is based on decades of research, travel, and personal encounters throughout the central Great Plains, and includes several experiences that happened in and around Hesston. Jim's presentation will explore the natural and cultural wonders of the Kaw watershed.



*Tuesday, February 25 (via Zoom)
with Katie Lamke*

Conserving Bumble Bees Through the Bumble Bee Atlas

Bumble Bees are a valuable group of pollinators but they are in decline along with so many other groups of insects. A growing community science effort, however, is hoping to reverse this trend. The Xerces Society's Bumble Bee Atlas is a program seeking to better understand the habitats in which bumble bees live. Katie Lamke, an endangered species conservation biologist with Xerces Society, will explain the plight of bumble bees, summarize this important program, and help you to get involved.



*Tuesday, March 25 (in person)
with Brenna Riley*

Up to Bat for the Ecosystem: Bats in Kansas

Often misunderstood, bats have a vital role to play. In Kansas, bats can be found roosting in caves, rocky outcroppings, under loose tree bark, and in human structures. Active at night, their diet includes a variety of insects. Many are familiar with these flying mammals, but few are aware of their importance in the ecosystem. Pheasants Forever biologist, Brenna Riley, will share how bats fit into conservation efforts, the threats they face, how research is conducted, and ways to support local bat populations.

Prairie LIGHTS presents *A Starry Night*

Visitors to this year's Prairie Lights will be looking skyward with the theme "A Starry Night." Prairie Lights will be open for two weekends only, November 29 to December 1 and December 6 to 8, each evening from 5:30 to 8:00 p.m. Get tickets at dyckarboretum.org/prairie-lights, and in the Arboretum gift shop. Tickets are \$5 per person ages 13 and older. Children 12 and younger are free.

Programming will alternate between educational programs, storytelling and music. Various astronomy experts, including Jerelyn Ramirez from the Kansas Astronomical Observers, Mary Smith from the Cosmosphere, Ron Mallory with his Ad Astra Mobile Planetarium and former Hesston College professor Jim Yoder, will present on the winter night sky. Musical performers will include Dave Anderson on hammered dulcimer, Ken Rodgers on piano, Prairie Bronze Handbell Ensemble, Outside the Bachs (clarinet and violin duo), Hand Pan Dan, and the Newton Community Children's Choir.



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Get Ready to Go Green by Mar 15!

Are you thinking about your 2025 wellness goals? For our 13th Go Green Leprechaun Run, we are continuing the 81k Challenge to get us all moving more in the late winter months. In the month preceding our 2-mile/10K Leprechaun Run event (Feb 15 to Mar 15), we challenge you to log an additional distance to kick-start your movement goals and/or to get you in peak shape to Go Green on March 15!

We've chosen the number 81 for several reasons: the Arboretum was founded in 1981 and Hesston is located on Highway 81. Eighty-one kilometers in 30 days amounts to 2.7 km/day (equal to 1.7 miles/day and 12 miles per week). Or perhaps you want to set your sights higher and make it 81 miles. Approximately 6,100 walking steps/day would help you meet that challenge.

We will have more details on our website soon. Plan to **READY, SET, GO GREEN** in the new year!



Staff

Scott Vogt, Executive Director/Horticulturist
Brad Guhr, Education/Prairie Restoration/
Concert Series Coordinator
Janelle Flory Schrock, Public Engagement
Coordinator
Katie Schmidt, Horticulturist/ Grounds Manager

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Kim Witt - Canton
Mike Zucconi - Hesston

Established by Harold and Elva Mae Dyck, the
Dyck Arboretum of the Plains operates under the
auspices of

