

PRAIRIE'S EDGE

A NEWSLETTER FROM FRIENDS OF SHERBURNE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

WINTER 2020

SANDHILL CELEBRATION

Friends put the Fun back in Fundraising

By Bruce Ellingson

Imagine you are Myrna Krueger, president of Friends of Sherburne (FOS). In January, you plan for a year of activities supporting Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge figuring 2020 will look a lot like 2019.

Then comes March and a pandemic, which closes USFWS facilities to the public and forces the refuge and Friends to cancel Every. Single. In-Person Event. For the Year. Period!

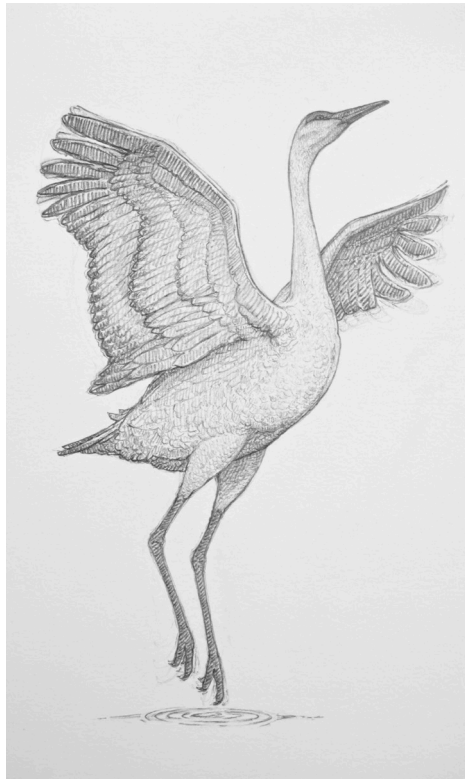
But in April the colorful warblers return as they migrate north, and in June the lupine bloom along the Prairie Trail. The rough blazing star still attract monarchs headed south in August, and the Sandhill cranes congregate at St. Francis Pool in October—by the thousands—to feed in friendly fields adjoining the refuge.

Minnesotans—and out-of-staters who love Minnesota's varied biomes—come as never before to the refuge to escape four walls and blue screens, to relax (and study) in the pure and spacious air.



Myrna Krueger

Myrna watches this happen. Friends members—denizens of the refuge themselves—experience the overflow-



Is the namesake of the Sandhill Celebration celebrating or taking flight?

Drawing by Kevin Johnson

ing parking lots. The wildlife, the visitors, the whole refuge need the support of Friends of Sherburne, whose president and volunteer committees face a never-before-met challenge: How will FOS help nature lovers support this refuge, so essential during a pandemic, without holding events?

The solution to a pandemic, according to Myrna, is to put the “fun” back in “fundraising” and to “put ourselves out there a bit as we learn new ways to fundraise and connect with new refuge lovers”. Having fun is how October’s fundraiser—*Sandhill Celebration*—came to exist.

The celebration chairperson was raised on a North Dakota farm, earned her horticulture degree with a minor in communications from North Dakota State University, and began her career as an extension agent. She worked for a host of ag companies, including Land O’ Lakes, and eventually settled into account management.

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EAGLE’S NEST NATURE STORE

Take Home Your Memories

By Bruce Ellingson

Sheri Olson hopes that she and her team at Eagle’s Nest Nature Store can “help you take home your experiences from the refuge.” Literally. A Sandhill crane buckled up in the back seat. A hat with an eagle on your head. A beaver puzzle for those early December evenings. A stuffed (toy) black bear for January bed company.

Sheri is the “sourcing manager” of the Eagle’s Nest Nature Store operated by the Friends of Sherburne at Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge, and she knows that volunteers, Minnesotans, and visitors from out of state who have driven miles to watch the Sandhill crane migration should take home more than fond memories

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From Facebook.



GIVING NOW MATTERS!

In a year when everything changed, more people visited the refuge than ever before. As the “getting outdoors” trend takes hold, Sherburne becomes more and more beloved by many, including nature enthusiasts, birders, hunters, hikers, and even commuters! This makes your generosity during this **year-end fundraising period** even more important. **Please support the refuge and its activities by making a gift or renewing your membership.** When you give, visitors receive more information, facilities and trails are improved, students learn outdoors in nature’s classroom, and events remain free to all. It’s your gift that makes it happen.

Thank you in advance from the Friends of Sherburne.

Friends Commit to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

We can do better! This summer the Friends board approved a statement that rejects racism in all its forms and embraces cultural and economic diversity. We want all to feel welcome and safe to visit the refuge. And we know that all people need the beauty and peace that nature and wildlife provide.

We have work to do. Friends DEI committee members, Emy Minzel, Randall Holt-Woehl, Debbie Russell, and Myrna Krueger, have taken on the task of developing a plan to become a truly inclusive organization, including recommending actions that will work toward making this vision a reality. The first phase is reaching out to people of all colors and ethnicity, regardless of religion, gender, or ability, in nearby areas to develop relationships, asking how we can collaborate and understanding what barriers might be keeping people away. Stay tuned. We’ll be sharing initial ideas and next steps at the Friends’ Annual Meeting in January.

FRIENDS OF SHERBURNE NWR 2020 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Myrna Krueger – President
Steven Chesney – Vice President
Carol VanHeel – Treasurer
Susan Julson – Secretary
Mike Brubaker – Director
Marilyn Danielson – Director
Matt Finn – Director
Randall Holt-Woehl – Director
Bill Kolbinger – Director
Emy Minzel – Director
Scott Suhsen – Director

ADVISORS TO THE BOARD

Steve Karel – Refuge Manager
Alaina Larkin – Visitor Services

Donate or Join Friends Online at [ExploreSherburne.org](https://www.exploresherburne.org)

The Friends of Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization (EIN: 41-1763001) that supports refuge projects and educational programs. All contributions are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law. The Prairie’s Edge newsletter is published twice annually for members in cooperation with the refuge.

Contact the Friends c/o Sherburne NWR, 17076 293rd Avenue NW, Zimmerman, MN 55398, or at FriendsofSherburne@gmail.com

LIVE ON FACEBOOK

Visitor Services Comes Face-first into Your Living Room (Virtually)

By Alaina Larkin
Visitor Services Manager

Put me in front of a crowd at *Spring Celebration* or the fall *Wildlife Festival*, and like an eagle I'm watching my audience. Whether there are 8 or 80 of you, your questions and expressions tailor my talk.

But sit me in front of a computer camera, and the butterflies that I love talking about fill my insides! Virtual programming—very one-on-one in a virtual way—has me talking into a camera while staring at my own face on-screen and wondering what your face is doing. At worst, it's like hollering into a canyon, with only echo as feedback. At its best, we see dozens of viewers sign on, questions scroll up the side of our screen, and hearts and likes floating between comments. That's pretty cool.

Virtual meeting time has forced me out of my comfort zone, and through much "exposure therapy" my nerves are beginning to settle down. Maybe now I know how you're feeling when confronting a bird or beast you've never seen before at the refuge!

Despite pandemic restrictions this year, we needed to connect with our refuge community. And virtual programming is the hottest thing since the telephone party line, so we tested our first Facebook Live program in June. Did you see Jenny's virtual flower tour? If not, it's right here and no need for a Facebook account to view: <https://fb.watch/1pmZfUJQyg/>

In September we dove headfirst ("Facefirst?") into regular Facebook programming with topics ranging from photography to wildflowers. In October our focus shifted to the timely topics of bats and Sandhill cranes. With every program we've tweaked our delivery, and as our butterflies settle, have tried to improve your interactive experience. We have a wonderful team who have taken their passion for talking to a roomful of people face-to-face to "Facebooking Live" with folks from, well, everywhere. Ashley Biggs, Jenny Hengel, Kris Spaeth, Sue Hix, and Myrna Krueger have all been important in helping us open a Facebook window permitting you to view life at the refuge, even during a pandemic.

Even more amazing, our Facebook Live and recorded programs have reached a larger audience than any of the annual tours or talks we have held with boots on the



Alaina Larkin

ground and people sitting side by side in the Oak Savanna Learning Center. While the experience may seem less intimate to us, we love how you've invited us into your phones and your homes. We're up for the challenge and plan to continue seasonal wildlife and refuge-specific programs this winter and spring! We've discovered that as much as you love to rove and recover at the refuge, you also love connecting with us from the sanctuary of your homes, knowing our world wide web content is local and safe.

For continued updates, "like" our Friends of Sherburne Facebook page here: facebook.com/sherburnerefugefans

Now, if you missed our first virtual refuge visits, here's where to find the entire list. Just click on the link to the Friends Facebook page within the individual program descriptions found on our refuge website: fws.gov/refuge/Sherburne/visit/events_calendar.html

See you soon, virtually!



Screenshot of Sept. 24th Wildflower Facebook Live.

BUR OAK WELCOME STATION COMPLETE

After 18 months of work with its share of surprises—including a partial government shutdown and the Coronavirus pandemic—the Bur Oak Welcome Station at the first stop on the Wildlife Drive is complete. This project, funded by Friends of Sherburne donors and a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, was the refuge version of This Old House. The project, designed to serve visitors of all ages and abilities, replaced aging tarmac with concrete, added a paved walkway to the toilets, replaced the aging kiosk with a 3-panel structure boasting all new and updated informational and interpretive signage as well as new brochure racks, added an ADA accessible picnic table with benches as well as a second picnic table on a separate concrete pad, installed Blue Goose bike racks—and more.

In a normal year, approximately 65% of Wildlife Drive visitors come on evenings and weekends when Refuge Headquarters is closed. In this pandemic year with offices closed since mid-March and no Roving Interpreters permitted to volunteer to assist visitors on the Drive, the Welcome Station proved more valuable than ever. **Thank you, Friends donors and staff and volunteers who took this project from a good idea to a welcoming stop!**



Placing finishing touches.



Photo by Bruce Ellingson

Myrna Krueger, leader of "fun"draising, with Gary Moss painting of Sandhill cranes.

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Management is now a significant challenge for the president of FOS. Myrna first discovered the refuge while living in St. Paul. She became a regular when she moved to Elk River.

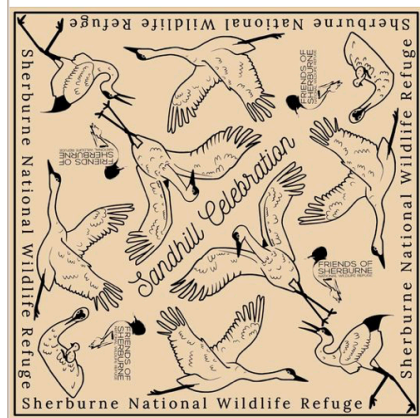
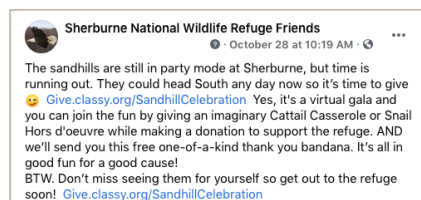
She began her refuge volunteering as a seed collector, a task she describes as "a fun romp in the prairie for us big kids who get to go out in the back areas of the refuge where no one else can go!" Truth is, Myrna feels a kinship with the volunteers she meets because "we're all interested in nature and I can learn from them."

Seed collecting may be a "romp" but also requires knowledge of which plants are native, which have seeds to give, and where the natives hide out on the refuge. It requires observation, attention to detail, and persistence (collecting in spite of bugs and heat). These are qualities that may have prepared Myrna to find the fun in fundraising during a pandemic.

It's mid-summer 2020. Sadly, spring has NOT been celebrated with the annual plant sale. There have been no student visits to the Oak

Savanna Learning Center, and it appears that the Wildlife Festival will be left for the wildlife to observe. How do we (Myrna is thinking) help lovers of the refuge—hundreds of them are literally walking the trails each week and driving the Wildlife Drive—support this sanctuary?!

Myrna and her team observe:



Bandana design by Ashley Biggs.

Refuge lovers love wildlife. Warblers. Blanding's turtles. Eagles... In the fall, Myrna knows, refuge lovers will parade along the byways welcoming the thousands of cranes passing through "Hotel Sherburne." Probably, these nature lovers, newly acquainted with the refuge, would love to help out a hungry crane...if it were allowed.

That's it. Fun! We'll have a dinner party for the cranes and invite the hundreds of refuge nature lovers to "Fun-d" the symbolic dinner. We'll serve Grasshopper Gratinée (just \$25) and Cattail Casserole (\$50 a plate) and Frog Leg Delight (\$100 delight) and, for the sophisticates, we have a Fresh Snail Hors d'oeuvre (a bargain at \$500 a plate). And, so, a virtual online banquet is planned for Sandhills in hopes of reaching a new audience here to escape the pandemic.

At press time *Sandhill Celebration* membership goals AND fundraising goals had been matched, surpassed, raised and surpassed again. Celebrating their Sandhills, refuge lovers fattened up the coffers of Friends of Sherburne. The fun-d drive, spanning

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all of October, took persistence and the creation of many social media messages. The persistent message: Join! Give!

Why Join? Why Give? Robin DeLong, Friends bird and flower expert extraordinaire, points to the beauty of nature and the gasps she hears from visitors whom she takes on tours of the lupine in bloom. Sue Hix, past Friends president, describes the feeling of inspiration she and her fellow nature education volunteers experience when they study with elementary students at the Oak Savanna Learning Center. “You have to love a place—nature and the environment—first,” she says, “before you begin to care about taking care of it.”

Myrna agrees. “We are supporting the refuge so that other people can enjoy it, students, young people, families.”

The Friends of Sherburne Board of Directors primed the fundraising coffers, each giving during the silent phase, and every Friends member who was asked volunteered talents to the *Sandhill Celebration* campaign. For the Friends of Sherburne, the *Sandhill Celebration* is a new piece to the annual fundraising plan. Even more important is the year-end mailing sent to Friends members and supporters with this newsletter, the traditional way that the Friends raise money for the coming year.

People have come to the refuge in record numbers this year, and consequently many new people have given to this online fundraiser and made the challenges of virtual fundraising, well, fun. Learning how to create an online fundraising site. Filling the site with (symbolic) tasty treats for cranes. Adding interesting stories and photos for supporters. It was all, well, fun! And it's not easy to find a picture of a geographically appropriate snail or to determine just what a crane—which will eat almost anything—eats in Sherburne County. “I didn't want to post pictures of fathead minnows—because maybe they don't even exist in Minnesota and maybe cranes don't even eat them!” said Myrna.

Even a horticulturalist knows—attention to detail—you don't feed a Sandhill that stops at Sherburne a Nebraska diet, not even in fun!



Sheri Olson has been the Eagle's Nest Sourcing Manager since January.

EAGLE'S NEST NATURE STORE

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and phone pictures. And, in spite of a pandemic, Sheri is helping visitors become customers.

Are you thinking, “Oh! I should have gotten a refuge t-shirt during my visit!”? Sheri is thinking the same thing and she's using Facebook to help you discover the many new products she has added to the store since January.

The nature store's number one best seller this summer was a pair of naturalist kits. The “Naturalist in Training” and the “Junior Naturalist” bags contain everything a youngster needs to track, capture, examine, record, and identify critters... along with a naturalist's “best practices” sheet to assure appropriate practices.

Sheri's knowledge of young naturalist practices comes with plenty of savvy. She's a volunteer for the refuge's nature education program. “I just love how we educate kids who may not have any experiences in nature, all sorts of kids with different backgrounds. I've had kids

come out here and say, ‘My dad said I'm not supposed to touch anything. There are wood ticks out here.’ Ok. Well. You start with that premise and go from there,” says Sheri.

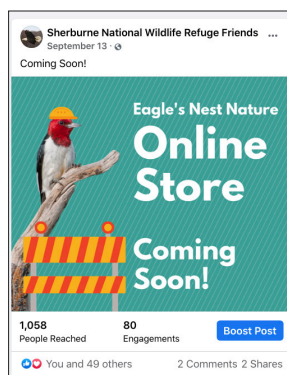
Sheri knows what young naturalists need...but just as important she knows how to get those bags to adults in COVID times. Advertise on the Friends of Sherburne Facebook page, communicate with potential customers via email, and then offer curbside pickup outside the Eagle's Nest Nature Store at the Oak Savanna Learning Center (OSLC).

Easy to be a customer, I can attest, as can three of my grandchildren who each received a naturalist bag in lieu of pandemic-term hugs.

USFWS COVID rules keep the Eagle's Nest closed for at least this year. So Sheri and crew began building an online nature store still under construction at presstime. Product availability will depend upon size, quantity, and shipping considerations. Holiday shopping will be available online at:

[SherburneEaglesNestStore.com](https://www.sherburneeaglesneststore.com)

Watch Friends Facebook page for more details. Kids—and you BIG KIDS—will find t-shirts, hats, masks, books, stuffed animals, puzzles, nature activity cards, and collectibles like pins and patches that will permit you to “take the refuge home with you.”



Design by Ashley Biggs



At the Saint Francis Pool, cranes arrive beginning an hour before sunset and leave loudly beginning at sunrise.

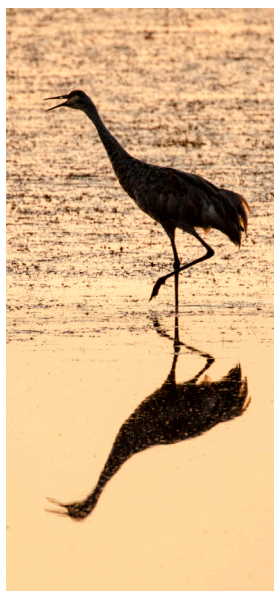
Smoke from Western fires smeared the atmosphere at the Saint Francis Pool



Leaving its mark.



Pool-side selfie.



Sunset serenade.

as I settled into my personal bird blind September 22 at 3:30 p.m. and awaited the evening arrival of the 2,000 to 3,000 cranes then feeding in the fields north of the refuge.

Of course, none came for hours (it seemed) as I whiled away the time watching the antics of immature eagles. In a week, at sunrise, I'd watch a coyote chase the young eagles off carrion, but today lacked that drama.

An overly eager novice on his first visit, I had arrived about two hours before any self-respecting Sandhill would finish his or her corn supper and return to roost at the pool.

Access to the pool—approved for a limited term by the USFWS—requires me to walk in, to remain just off the maintenance road, to minimize any disturbance of the birds, and to provide the USFWS with my imagery for their sole use and distribution. Friends of Sherburne are using photos “with approval” in their *Sandhill Celebration* fundraising as well as in this newsletter.

The pool is large enough to assure that birds are several football fields away from my lens. Facing west directly into a setting sun guarantees backlit images and silhouettes at sunset, and beautiful, but minimal, over-the-shoulder light at sunrise.

Westerly evening winds assure that birds will swoop into the pool from the east, buzzing my position as they target their roost. I love the cranes' elegant and awkward acrobatics as they bank to land. I asked a biologist friend why they do this. His response: “Because they can.”



Stylistic landings on pool's western edge.



Parents and juvenile return from all-day meal.



Fiery September sunset hangs above the pool.

Challenging Year!

Managing & Protecting Resources

By Steve Karel,
Project Leader

Hello, Friends,
We had a very challenging summer at the refuge! Though we've all had to adjust to new ways of living and working during the pandemic, as the fall migration again brings large populations of Sandhill cranes, geese, ducks, and other migrants to the refuge, it is evident that the migrants haven't had to make the kinds of changes that we humans have had to make. We overcame many hurdles as USFWS employees were directed to conduct our work from home whenever possible. Our Regional Director, Charlie Wooley, made it very clear from the beginning that the safety of the staff, volunteers, Friends, and visitors

was his highest priority. As a project leader, I also made it mine. This resulted in the refuge headquarters and Oak Savanna Learning Center (OSLC) being closed to the public, and we still have not returned to open status. However, even with these challenges, my staff and I continued to focus our energy on our important work of managing habitat and protecting our natural resources. We all learned how to work together, separately, and were able to accomplish some amazing projects that in some cases may not have been completed otherwise. I'd like to share just a few of these accomplishments.

Visitor services staff completely redesigned our hunting and public use brochures and also developed many new regulatory and directional signs for refuge kiosks and parking lots. They are currently working on designing new directional signage for refuge trails.

Our maintenance team's projects included rehabilitating public access roads with new gravel, with

work completed on the Wildlife Drive and Brande and Old School House Roads. Other improvements included a new surface at the Long Pool boat ramp, installing new signs at refuge entrances and on kiosks, removing invasive brush along the OSLC trails, and completing the Welcome Station project on the Wildlife Drive.

The biology staff treated invasive species, including leafy spurge, Canada thistle, and crown vetch, as well as coordinating aerial treatment of 924 acres of invasive cattail in various areas of the refuge. Grazing operations continued with goats finishing a brush reduction grant project along the Mahnomen Trail and prescribed grazing with cattle on 4,600 acres. The Sherburne Habitat Management Plan (HMP) was completed along with countless surveys and habitat monitoring projects.

With almost the entire staff maintaining wildland fire-fighting qualifi-



Steve Karel,
Project Leader

cations, we were able to assist with fighting fires on a national level during one of the busiest wildfire seasons in history. Nine staff members provided their services out west for more than 346 staff days in a 5-month period. This was an incredible commitment for our firefighters as well as for those who carried the workload in their absence.

Our refuge law enforcement officer had an overwhelming 706 offenses and incidents that were investigated and reported within the complex. The majority of the citations and warnings were issued for trespass, hunting/poaching, vandalism, and dogs off leash.

In addition, we were thrilled to be able to bring on a new employee, Christina Giarusso, to replace Elizabeth Roberts, who left last year. (See page 8 for picture and details).

Finally, managers made a lot of adjustments and assumed a significant workload to obtain regional approvals to conduct refuge work activities, provide adequate staff safety training, and acquire hard to find safety supplies needed to continue our work during the pandemic.

I am very pleased that the staff accomplished so much at Sherburne NWR while still contributing their time on a wide array of projects at Rice Lake NWR, Crane Meadows NWR, and Litchfield Wetland Management District—dealing with the pandemic challenges along the way.

Stay Wild, My Friends!

IMAGINING AN AMPHITHEATER: Developing a Design

With the Bur Oak Welcome Station completed, the Oak Savanna Learning Center outfitted and work on Learning Center trails and the viewing blind being wrapped up, the Friends Board began asking, "What's next?" Encouraged by refuge staff, the board started imagining what an amphitheater could add to refuge programs and events. The ideal site would be behind the Learning Center, with the amphitheater built into the hill facing south and west toward School House Pool. At the board's socially distanced September meeting, directors explored the potential site and imagined sitting on the hillside enjoying a presentation at the Wildlife Festival, working with groups of students spread out on the amphitheater tiers, or just relaxing with a friend after a hike on the trails. The next step is to develop a design and obtain cost estimates for this ambitious project. More information to come in 2021!



Steve Karel leads survey of a site.

**FRIENDS OF SHERBURNE
ANNUAL MEETING
THURSDAY, JANUARY 14, 6:30 P.M.**

Annual meeting WILL NOT BE IN-PERSON

PARTICIPATION FORMATS:

- Zoom Video Meeting and Conference Call
- Zoom link and logins will be provided in Friends *Prairie Insider* e-news.
- Call-in-Only Option: 1 (408) 638 0968, Meeting ID: 284 300 6080, Participant number, press #, Pass-code: 816213

AGENDA

- Introductions
- 2020 Friends Accomplishments and Reports
- What's Coming in 2021
- Vote to Approve 2021 Budget
- Refuge Update
- Election of Board Members

Complete 2021 Meeting Agenda and unapproved minutes from the 2020 Annual Meeting are available online at [Exploresherburne.org/about-friends](https://exploresherburne.org/about-friends) or by calling 763-260-3078. Requests must be made by January 5.

Christina Giarusso

Administrative Support Assistant

Christina Giarusso recently joined the USFWS staff, will be based primarily at Sherburne Refuge and will be in charge of tracking the spending for Sherburne, Rice Lake, and Crane Meadows and balancing their budget. Her duties also include processing collections on behalf of the refuges, making payments, and validating employee timecards.

Christina previously worked for the State of Wyoming and the City and County of Denver, Colorado. She is very excited to begin a new journey with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and to use her bachelor's degree in Business Administration with a concentration in Human Resources Management. Christina is originally from Arlington, Virginia.



Christina Giarusso

UPCOMING EVENTS

Upcoming Events

As of this writing in late October, refuge facilities—except for outdoor-accessible restrooms—remain closed, and no in-person events are being planned. However, Friends have been collaborating with refuge staff to offer Facebook Live events, and more of these very popular programs are being planned for coming months. For more information about virtual events:

- Events Calendar on the refuge website: fws.gov/refuge/Sherburne/visit/events_calendar.html
- Friends Facebook page: facebook.com/sherburnerefugefans
- Friends e-news, the *Prairie Insider*. Not a subscriber yet? Sign up by typing your email address in the space at the bottom of the Friends website home page: ExploreSherburne.org

We invite you to enjoy selections on the growing list of videos produced from these virtual events. For what's available see the Friends Facebook page: facebook.com/sherburnerefugefans/videos Program topics include spring and fall wildflowers, fall birds, photography tips and tricks for beginners, live animals from Osprey Wilds Environmental Learning Center, and bats of Minnesota starring Edgar, the little brown bat, from the North Lakeland Discovery Center (WI).

December 2020

Stay tuned to the *Prairie Insider* e-news and the Friends Facebook page for holiday shopping opportunities at the Eagle's Nest Nature Store. Online shopping coming soon with curbside pickup also available.

Thursday, January 14, 2021, 6:30 pm

Plan to attend the Friends' Annual Meeting via Zoom.

Mid-January 2021

Check the refuge website's *Just for Kids* page for information and entry form for the 2021 Youth Photography Contest. K - 12 students can get a jump on their 2021 entry by getting out to the refuge this winter to capture photos of animal tracks, frost decorating foliage, the glitter of the snow, or winter scenes that inspire the imagination. (Hint: Very few winter photos are normally entered in competition!)