



# Meadowlark

celebrating our 50<sup>th</sup> year

SEPT/OCT 2022  
VOL 51 ISSUE 4

## Make a little history at October's Member Meeting!



Mark your calendar for 6 p.m., Thursday, October 13, to take advantage of a golden opportunity to celebrate Audubon Society of Omaha's 50th anniversary at Lauritzen Gardens with Neal Ratzlaff, past ASO president and director, and Bird Seed Sale co-founder. Neal will focus on "The Birds of Lewis and Clark," recounting the explorers' ornithological achievements and touching on the convoluted, almost tortuous, nearly 100-year trek the expedition's journals took to publication.

Enjoy tours of the Gardens, starting at 6, and peruse ASO scrapbooks from 50 years of birding, but be in your seat by 7 for Neal's enlightening look at the Lewis and Clark expedition's impact on ornithology.

As conceived by President Thomas Jefferson and undertaken by Captains Meriwether Lewis and William Clark — and the approximately 30-member Corps of Discovery — the expedition's mission was "to explore the Missouri River, & such principle (sic) stream of it, as, by its course and communication with the waters of the Pacific ocean (sic), whether the Columbia, Oregon,

Colorado or any other river may offer the most direct & practicable water communication across this continent for the purpose of commerce."

Jefferson saw Lewis as a man "of courage undaunted," an assessment the entire Corps validated throughout its extraordinary journey. Following a year of preparation, the expedition left its winter staging camp near St. Charles, Missouri, in the spring of 1804 and wound its way to the mouth of the Columbia River in present-day Oregon, returning to St. Louis by September 1806.

During his presentation, Neal will describe the birds the Corps encountered and detail the critical role Lewis's and Clark's journals played in expanding knowledge of the natural world of their era. Featuring illustrations of both familiar birds and species "new to science," the journals represent major milestones of the waning years of the Age of Enlightenment. And, drawn from two volumes of letters relating to the expedition compiled by Donald Jackson, former editor of the University of Illinois Press, Neal will trace the travels of the five live animals the explorers sent to President Jefferson — a Sharp-

tailed Grouse, a prairie dog and three Magpies from what is now North Dakota — in the spring of 1805.

He will also explore why Meriwether Lewis may not be recognized as one of America's premier early ornithologists, despite having documented at least eight species of birds "new to science" and several others not recorded in as much detail, but, nevertheless, clearly identifiable and also "new to science."

The reasons behind this historical oversight lie in the fate of Lewis's journals and the tangled history of the artifacts collected by the Corps of Discovery. Neal will catalogue the cast of characters contributing to this frustrating but ultimately rewarding narrative, including publisher Nicholas Biddle, botanist Benjamin Smith Barton, painter and naturalist Charles Wilson Peale, naturalist George Ord, and Alexander Wilson, author of the nine-volume American Ornithology.

So, join us at Lauritzen Gardens on Thursday, September 13, at 6 p.m. to learn more about Lewis and Clark and the natural world, and celebrate Audubon Society of Omaha's Golden Anniversary.



*A Sharp-tailed Grouse, a prairie dog and three Magpies were sent to President Jefferson from North Dakota.*

# ON THE HORIZON September

## MEMBER PROGRAM

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 8

**Speaker:** TBD, find details on the calendar tab at [audubon-omaha.org](http://audubon-omaha.org)

**When:** 7 p.m.

**How:** Register for this meeting at [audubon-omaha.org](http://audubon-omaha.org)

**Who:** Members and the public (free)

## FIELD TRIP

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 10

**What:** Tour the UNO Audubon Chapter's Indigenous Garden followed by an hour of bird watching at Elmwood Park. A brief overview of the history and plants of the garden will be given by Kyle Finley, one of the founders of the UNO Audubon Chapter and garden.

**When:** 7:30 a.m. to 9 a.m.

**Where:** UNO Kayser Hall, 202 University Dr. E., Omaha

# October

## BIRDSEED ORDERS DUE

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 6

**Details:** See page 6 of this issue

## MEMBER MEETING AND 50TH ANNIVERSARY

### CELEBRATION

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 13

**Speaker:** Neal Ratzlaff

**Topic:** "The Birds of Lewis and Clark," recounting the explorers' ornithological achievements and the nearly 100-year trek the expedition's journals took to publication.

**When:** 6 p.m. garden tour, 7 p.m. program, then birthday cake!

**Where:** Lauritzen Gardens

**How:** Register for this meeting at [audubon-omaha.org](http://audubon-omaha.org)

**Who:** Members and the public (free)

## PICKUP BIRDSEED ORDERS

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 15

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 16

**Where:** ASO Office, 4339 S. 90th

# Field notes from the President

by Christine Prescott-Jacobsen, President, Audubon Society of Omaha



*As we prepare for the 50th anniversary celebration of Audubon Society of Omaha, I would like to thank two specific groups of volunteers that have given so much to the organization over the years. First, all of the volunteers, past and present, that have worked tirelessly on the Meadowlark newsletter for the past 50 years. This publication is always full of current and accurate information for our members. It is a publication that everyone looks forward to receiving and perusing for months. Thank you all for the time you dedicate to each and every issue.*

*Secondly, let's recognize all the past-presidents of ASO. Thank you for leading this organization, and spearheading conservation work in the Omaha area. I am honored to follow in the footsteps of these amazing leaders:*

Dick Russell 1971-72	Neal Ratzlaff 1982-83	Nelli Falzgraf 2003-05
Loren Padleford 1972-73	Ron Cisar 1983-84	Elliott Bedows 2005-08
Fr. Thomas Hoffman 1973	Ione Werthman 1984-86	Clem Klaphake 2008-10
Teta Kain 1973-74	Jim Ducey 1986-88	Jerry Toll 2010-12
Evelyn Conrad 1974-75	Jim Glather 1988-90	Justin Rink 2012-13
Eunice Kawamoto 1975-76	Ed Higgins 1990-92	Laurine Blankenau 2013-15
Hal Chase 1976-77	Roland Barth 1992-1994	Tad Leeper 2015-16
Al Werthman 1977-78	Betty Allen 1994-96	Matt Miller 2016-19
Charles Johnson 1978-80	Lisa Peterson 1996-2000	Robert Wells 2019-2021
Marlene Weber 1980-82	Eric Scholar 2000-03	

*I hope you can all join us as we celebrate 50 years of bringing environmental awareness to our community through education, conservation and enjoyment of our natural heritage, especially birds, on October 13th.*

# A Bird's-eye View of the Past 50 Years from Neal Ratzlaff

Told to Dan Murphy



To paraphrase Johnny Cash, when it comes to Audubon Society of Omaha, Neal Ratzlaff has, indeed, been everywhere, man. Literally.

Over the years, birding has inspired Neal to migrate from the Atlantic to the Pacific and from Maine to Louisiana. He has flown to New Zealand, Costa Rica, Trinidad and Tobago (whose Main Ridge Forest Preserve shelters hummingbirds). Closer to home, Neal has swooped across North Dakota, the Sandhills, Pine Ridge and Indian Cave State Park – not to mention Nebraska's sewage treatment plants, where “waterfowl” takes on a whole new meaning. “It’s been a great ride,” he says.

He traces his “serious interest” in birds to 1972, when he moved back to Omaha in his mid-30s. Soon after, Father Thomas Hoffman, the Glenwood Christmas Bird Count captain, took Neal under his wing, mentoring him on birding basics. Since then, Neal estimates he has completed about 40 counts in that quadrant, first as one of Father Hoffman’s rookies, then as the quadrant captain when Father Hoffman could no longer participate, and now as “a sentimental old veteran who can’t see or hear nearly as well as he used to.

“Oh, the friends I’ve made – great and enduring friendships with nice folks, spanning the field of nature and promoting interests in plants, butterflies and more,” he adds.

## NEAL HELPS PILOT ASO THROUGH ITS EARLY YEARS

In the mid-’70s, Neal began an enduring relationship with Audubon Society of Omaha. By the end of the decade, he took on the role of a director, and from 1981-1982, he served as ASO president.

Led by Neal and fellow board members Marlene Weber and John Upchurch, as well as National Audubon Society Regional Representative Ed Pembleton, ASO kicked off its first Birdseed Sale in 1981. Neal chaired the annual fund- and consciousness-raiser from 1981 through the mid-1990s, when he was succeeded by Kathleen Crawford Rose until John and Betty Fullerton took the reins more recently. From 1983 through 2018, when ASO consolidated the seed distribution process at its new office and warehouse location, Neal distributed birdseed from his garage.

Neal’s many contributions to Audubon Society of Omaha have earned him two service awards, one in 1986 and the other in 1999.

In addition to his upcoming presentation on “The Birds of Lewis and Clark,” he has been the featured speaker at both annual and monthly member meetings, including one program focusing on wildflowers with Roland Barth, with whom he co-authored two books, including a field guide to wildflowers for Fontenelle Forest.



## WHAT DOES NEAL REMEMBER MOST FONDLY?

“Field trips, Christmas Counts and Birdseed Sales – I’ve made lasting friendships at all of these events,” he emphasizes.

## WHAT ARE THE MOST SIGNIFICANT IMPACTS ON BIRDING NEAL HAS SEEN?

“Even old guys like me have been influenced by new technologies,” he observes. “Email certainly affected us, but the advent of cell phones really changed the game. Now, one has almost instant access to whatever cool sighting any birder who group texts or uses eBird has come across.” Regrettably, due in part to Covid, Neal notes that “I don’t think we do nearly as much group birding as we used to.

“My field notebook has all but disappeared in favor of the sightings I enter on eBird,” he says, adding, “I often lament the disappearance of my notebook, but I really value the data eBird observers generate.”

Neal cites digital photography as an additional game changer. “Those long documentations of unusual bird sightings you hoped the records committee would believe have been replaced, for the most part, by photographic documentation. Unlike some in newer generations who bird mainly with their cameras, I still use my binoculars,” he says.

Like other experts and naturalists, Neal lists habitat loss and climate change as two of the greatest challenges that require concerted attention around the globe.

## WHAT CAN WE DO TO PROMOTE BIRDING FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS?

Helping people connect with and experience nature for themselves is a vital first step, Neal contends.

*(continued on page 7)*

# 50 years of conservation, community and education

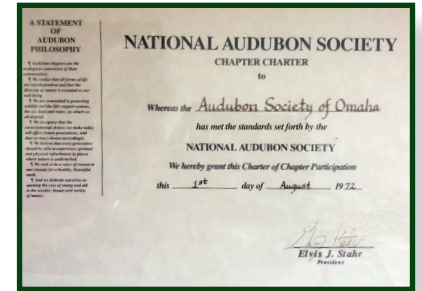


**THE YEAR WAS 1972.** The cost of gas was 55 cents a gallon. The average cost of a new house was \$27,550 and the average income per year was \$11,800. The last US ground troops were withdrawn from Vietnam. Title IX was enacted into law, prohibiting federally funded education institutions from discriminating against students or employees based on sex. It was the year of popular music groups ABBA, The Eagles and the Doobie Brothers; and movies The Godfather and The Poseidon Adventure. Swimmer Mark Spitz won a record seven gold medals at the Munich Olympics.

**FLASH BACK TO 1961.** A small group of birders banded together to form the Omaha Bird Club. They shared a passion for birds and nature. Two years later, they began participating in National Audubon's Christmas Bird count. Their numbers grew as word of their club got around, and a decade later, they voted to apply to join the National Audubon Society. Their application was approved and in 1972, they officially became the Audubon Society of Omaha, the first chapter in Nebraska.

That year, Audubon Society of Omaha took on a battle that ultimately saved the Platte River staging area for 75 percent of the continent's migrating Sandhills Cranes, more than a million ducks and geese, and the rare and endangered whooping cranes. The Mid-States Reclamation project planned to take water out of the Platte in that area for irrigation, leaving it virtually dry for months and possibly years at a time. ASO proposed that federal officials permanently set aside a portion of the river between Lexington and Grand Island as a bird refuge.

The defeat of the Mid-States irrigation project by the voters of Nebraska was a resounding victory and sent shock waves to Washington, D.C. The project had failed despite a massive advertising campaign by the federal government, financed with tax funds. In April 1972, National Audubon announced the purchase of three tracts of land that encompassed two miles of Platte River frontage. The area was named the Lillian Annette Rowe Bird Sanctuary after the late New Jersey resident who bequeathed the funds for a refuge.



**OVER THE PAST 50** years, countless volunteer hours from members who are passionate about our mission, have allowed our nonprofit organization to thrive. As we look back at our history and accomplishments, we can find inspiration to achieve our vision: We strive to appreciate, learn, and conserve our region's unique biodiversity. In doing so, we will help our community appreciate nature and understand its importance. Ultimately, we aim to inspire others to join us in actively protecting our native ecosystems and restoring nature-friendly environments in the greater Omaha area.

*Sunset over the Platte River at the Rowe Sanctuary's new viewing blind during Sandhill Cranes' peak migration.*

# : A brief history of Audubon Society of Omaha

**1972** – Audubon Society of Omaha (ASO) becomes the first National Audubon Society chapter in the state of Nebraska

**1982** – ASO begins its Birdseed Sale, which continues to be the most successful and popular fundraising effort of our chapter.

**1986** – ASO, along with conservationists statewide, joins forces to prevent construction of the Norden Dam, which would have stopped the flow of the Niobrara River, the most scenic and ecologically important river in the state.

**1988** – ASO teams up with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Raptor Recovery Center, and Fontenelle Forest, to release 22 peregrine falcons on the roof of the Woodmen Tower in Omaha. ASO coordinates with Woodmen Tower and builds boxes for the falcons.

**EARLY 90s** – ASO starts a bluebird nest box route by building the boxes and then monitoring them, and reporting the results to Bluebirds Across Nebraska.

**1992** – ASO and Papio-Missouri Rivers Natural Resources District saves an 11-acre wetland, Heron Haven. ASO turns over conservation to the NRD in 2005 with its conservation easement and oversight.

**1995** – ASO starts a kestrel nest box route along the Kennedy Freeway and Highway I-680. With permission from the Nebraska Game & Parks Commission and the Nebraska Department of Transportation, ASO

constructed the boxes, monitored them, and reported the results to the NGPC until 2002.

**1998** – ASO purchases a 13-acre eastern tallgrass prairie preserve that continues to be restored to its original state. It's now home to over 80 species of flowers and grasses as well as grassland birds, mammals such as badgers, fox, rabbits, gophers, three species of mice, and reptiles.

**1999** – The Omaha Raptor Team joins the ASO and provides educational programs with non-releasable birds of prey for schools, scouts, civic and other community groups until disbanding in 2006.

**1999** – ASO receives a conservation easement on 52 acres of greenspace that winds around the Allen Hills housing area in Washington County. This is the only conservation easement that ASO owns, and our Natural Areas Management Chairperson monitors it annually.

**1999** – The Audubon Society of Omaha earns the Omaha World-Herald's Conservationist of the Year Award for its efforts on behalf of Heron Haven.



**2001** – ASO expands the Student Art Contest for K-12 and home-schooled students in the Greater Omaha area. Exhibition of all artwork and the awards ceremonies are held in venues accessible to the public and continues each year.

**2003** – ASO hosts guided walks at backyards of members, reaching out to the community and raising funds. Discontinued in 2008 to focus on our prairie preserve.

**2008** – ASO conducts annual, guided walk & talk about tall-grass prairies, herbaceous plants, wildflowers, birds, insects at our prairie preserve.

**2014** – ASO initiates an open-to-the-public free special speaker series annually with expert-led field trips featuring renowned birders/authors.

**2018** – ASO acquires the only known Missouri Valley, Loess Hills-type prairie in Nebraska. Saved from the plow and other incursions, the 10-acre prairie, which houses the one-acre Cuming City Cemetery near Blair remains as it was when Native Americans were its only human inhabitants. This site will be extremely valuable to botanists and others dedicated to preserving remaining native prairies and plants.

**2020** – Worldwide pandemic caused by the SARS-Covid virus puts the world on hold. ASO continues the monthly member programs with virtual meetings, and the student art contest goes online.

**THE NEXT 50 YEARS?** – Join us in helping ASO make an impact for the next 50 years and generations to come.

# Please Get Your Birdseed Orders in by October 6

by Betty Fullerton

Do you feed birds? Would you like to contribute to the financial success of Audubon Society of Omaha? Your orders and donations during the Fall and Winter Bird Seed Sale are Audubon Omaha's main fundraiser for local education and conservation activities. We offer a wide range of birdseed mixes and sizes at reasonable prices.

If you are new to birding or want some expert advice, you will find several articles from National Audubon Society and Cornell Lab of Ornithology with ideas about attracting and feeding birds on ASO's website, <https://audubon-omaha.org>, under the Special Events/Semiannual Bird Seed Sale tab.

In early September, ASO will mail an order form to all members and past customers. You can place your order by mail OR you can order and pay by credit card on ASO's website. You must pre-order to purchase birdseed, and **all orders must be received by Thursday, October 6**. Pickup dates are Saturday, October 15, and Sunday, October 16. Contactless delivery will be available again this year for an additional donation.

If you have friends or neighbors who would like to be added to the mailing list, contact John and Betty Fullerton at 402-493-4362(h) or 402-957-5901(c) or at [efullerton00@gmail.com](mailto:efullerton00@gmail.com) with their names and addresses. OR you can send your friends or neighbors a link to the birdseed sale page on the ASO website.

## WE NEED VOLUNTEERS!

Are you in good shape? Can you lift as much as 50 pounds without hurting yourself? Volunteers are needed for three different days. Please contact John Fullerton at 402-493-4362 (h), 402-957-5901 (c) or [efullerton00@gmail.com](mailto:efullerton00@gmail.com) if you can help with this major fundraiser.

*Audubon Society of Omaha remains committed to providing you and your feathered winter visitors with the highest quality bird seed, available at competitive prices from our longtime supplier, Des Moines Feed Co. We are proud to offer a wider selection than anywhere else in town. Below you will find a product listing with detailed descriptions for each item we offer. Thank you for your support. We wish you many happy hours of bird feeding and watching.*

**CARDINAL BRAND MIX** - Millet base with added milo, cracked corn, peanut chips and 20% sunflower by volume.

**DES MOINES STANDARD MIX** - Higher-quality basic mix with millet base, cracked corn, oat groats, peanut pieces and 40% sunflower seeds by volume. No milo.

**DES MOINES CLASSIC MIX** - Basic ingredients same as Des Moines Standard, except sunflower is a 50/50 mix of seeds and hearts, and it also contains safflower. Attracts the widest variety of seed-eating birds.

**DES MOINES DELUXE MIX** - Same as Des Moines Classic, except it contains more peanuts and hulled sunflower hearts.

**DES MOINES REGAL MIX** - A premium blend of sunflower hearts, shelled peanuts, safflower seed, dried cherries, raisins and a protein-vitamin supplement.

**SUNFLOWER SEED, BLACK OIL** - Smaller, more nutritious seeds preferred by most winter birds.

**SUNFLOWER HEARTS** - Fine hearts are ground seeds suitable for mixing with nyjer in a thistle feeder. Medium hearts are about 1/3 the size of whole



Pine Siskin, photo by Patsy McQuad

hearts. Coarse hearts are larger pieces.

**NYJER & FINE HEARTS** - Blended at 50/50 ratio for easy flow through finch feeders. Both seed types are re-cleaned by Des Moines Feed before packaging to enhance the mix's appeal to finches, chickadees and nuthatches.

**RICH & TWEET** - Nutritious, no-mess mixture with dried raisins and cherries. Contains 50% peanut hearts and pieces. It is designed to attract fruit-eaters such as robins, thrushes and other ground feeders.

**WOODPECKER GOURMET** - A blend that is full of nuts. Contains almonds, other tree nuts, pumpkin seeds and raisins.

**BUSHY TAIL TREAT** - No squirrel tails in it! A mix of peanuts, sunflower, whole corn, raisins, pumpkin seed and feed pellets that will tempt even an anorexic squirrel's palate!

**PEANUT TREAT SUET** - A mix of rendered beef suet and roasted, chopped peanuts for woodpeckers, nuthatches and chickadees.

**NUTRASAFF** - Hulled safflower seed. Higher in protein and oil with less mess.

**THANK YOU** - From the Bird Seed Sale Committee and all of us at Audubon Society of Omaha.

# A Bird's-eye View with Neal Ratzlaff

*continued from pg 3*

“For me, personally, it involves introducing my grandchildren to nature every chance I get and hoping that, somehow, love of and respect for nature will take root amid the worlds of sports and technology.

“We need places where people can experience nature,” he continues, “places like our ASO prairies, Spring Creek Prairie, Rowe Sanctuary, and Fontenelle Forest. We need to provide educational opportunities – field trips, guided hikes/trips wherever and whenever we can.

“It can be as simple as feeding birds in your yard, he says. “That can be a great connector for many people.”

Neal also encourages planting pollinator-friendly yards, as well as native plant species, which will thrive,

often without green-thumb care. And he discourages the use of pesticides and herbicides, wondering if “a perfect bluegrass lawn” is as valuable in the long run as a bit of natural diversity.

## WHAT'S NEXT FOR NEAL?

“At my age,” Neal says, “the birding bucket list is fast becoming a list of things I wish I had done rather than a list of specific things I'd like to do. Yes, I do have all kinds of lists, and, yes, I have been known to pursue that rare and unusual bird. But, when you think about it, by and large, birding is just an excuse to be out in nature.

“Who knows? That next awesome unexpected experience might just be better than anything you thought of putting on your bucket list.”

## The eyes have it – your photos

*We need your bird photos! Please email them to Meadow Lark at [asopublisher@gmail.com](mailto:asopublisher@gmail.com)*



*White-breasted Nuthatch, Photo by Molly Beck*



*Yellow Warbler, Photo by Richard Thies*



*Ruby-throated Hummingbird, by Lorraine Feldhausen*



*Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Photo by Jennifer Dobby*

## RESOURCES & INFO:

### HOW TO JOIN/RENEW/UPDATE

Join or renew your membership online at [auduon-omaha.org](http://auduon-omaha.org) and select “Get Involved.” Save paper and avoid confusion. Your membership with National Audubon automatically makes you a member of Audubon Society of Omaha.

### CHANGE OF ADDRESS?

Please call National Audubon toll-free at 1-844-428-3826, or send an email to [audubon@emailcustomerservice.com](mailto:audubon@emailcustomerservice.com)

### STAY CONNECTED

Join our email list at [audubon-omaha.org](http://audubon-omaha.org) under “Get Involved.”

### BEQUESTS & GIFTS

A bequest to Audubon Society of Omaha is a gift to those who will succeed us and secure our natural heritage. Want to send us a 50th birthday gift? You can make a donation anytime at [audubon-omaha.org](http://audubon-omaha.org). OR you can mail your check along with the name and address of the person to be notified to:

Audubon Society of Omaha  
P.O. Box 3542, Omaha, NE 68103

### HELP WANTED: EXEC. ADMIN.

Know anyone who can help ASO keep its ducks in a row? Audubon Society of Omaha is looking for a bird-loving, part-time, paid contract Executive Administrator. Most tasks are the work-from-home kind. Interested? Find the details at [audubon-omaha.org](http://audubon-omaha.org), then in “Who We Are,” and then “Careers.” NOTE: We will invest the time and effort to teach our new Administrator how to maintain our website.

**TAKE ACTION** Big things are happening, so communicate with your elected officials. Go to [audubon-omaha.org](http://audubon-omaha.org) for links to contact info for each.

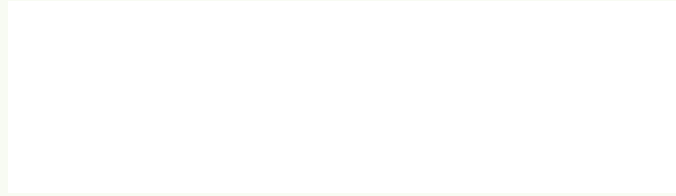
### INJURED BIRD?

Raptors: Call 866-888-7261 to speak to a Raptor Recovery volunteer.

Non-raptor: Call Nebraska Wildlife Rehab at 402-234-2473.

Audubon  
Society of Omaha  
P.O. Box 3542  
Omaha, NE 68103  
audubon-omaha.org

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STEWARDSHIP OF THE EARTH AND ITS CREATURES

# the Meadowlark

celebrating our 50<sup>th</sup> year

SEPT/OCT 2022  
VOL 51 ISSUE 4

*Photo by Phil Swanson*

*The Audubon Society of Omaha is dedicated to the active promotion of environmental awareness to our community through education, conservation, and enjoyment of our natural heritage, especially birds.*

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**ELECTED OFFICERS**

President: Christine Prescott-Jacobsen  
Past President: Bob Wells  
1st Vice President: Michaela Johnson  
2nd Vice President: OPEN  
Treasurer: Michelle Foss  
Secretary: Anne Maguire

**ELECTED DIRECTORS**

Scott Bradley	Amy Campagna
Kyle Finley	Grace Gaard
Nick Romero	Katy Simmons
Ashleigh Stohlman	Heidi Walz

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