



The Jasper County Jewel

Jasper County Conservation Board Quarterly Newsletter Summer 2026

"Jasper County Should Be Proud"

Christopher Braunschweig
Newton News, 06/02/2026

More than 30 years of planning and fundraising came to fruition this past week as Jasper County Conservation unveiled its long-awaited nature center. Dubbed the Dana King Ceretti Environmental Education Center, it is not only the new home of conservation staff but also an a space that inspires learning.

At the ribbon cutting ceremony on Friday, May 29, kids were already building towers with wood and bones, tugging the tails of animal pelts, examining the finer details of a dragonfly wing, playing with animal puppets and inspecting the scaly critters behind the glass. Wide grins stretched across their cheeks.

Carol Kramer, a longtime member of the Jasper County Conservation Board, was smiling just as wide watching them embrace their new nature center. She was reminded of when Dennis Black, the former director of conservation, yearned to have a nature center established in Jasper County.

"He dreamed of finding a center just for children," Kramer said in an interview with Newton News the day of the ribbon cutting. "When he retired, Keri (Van Zante) came along and kept fostering this idea. And, oh, I'm just so pleased. I can hardly stand it. It's been years — years — in the making."

Kramer has stood behind the nature center project throughout her 30-plus years on the Jasper County Conservation Board. Her support and her contributions have led to the establishment of Kramer Park, the area where the entire nature center resides. But her name is also now found inside the nature center.

Admittedly, Kramer was a bit embarrassed to see the Carol Kramer Conservation Classroom for the first time, but knowing it was a gift from her late husband, Fritz, certainly tempered any



Above: Jasper County Conservation held a ribbon cutting on May 29 for the Dana King Ceretti Environmental Education Center. Photo by Christopher Braunschweig.

awkward feelings. As a teacher for [many] years, Kramer is excited to see she has a permanent classroom for kids to enjoy. "I just love it," Kramer said.

It just so happens one of Kramer's students was Dana King Ceretti, whom the nature center is named after. King Ceretti was a graduate of Newton High School and the University of Northern Iowa. She also taught at Thomas Jefferson Elementary. She died at age 30 in 2009 of cystic fibrosis.

Her parents, Jeff and Jodi King, have been major donors towards the project, and even issued a donation challenge that surpassed its initial goal. To see the nature center finally open to the public, Jeff King said, is overwhelming and "great for the community and great for Jasper County and the whole region."

In addition to learning about native plants, animals and prairies at the nature center, visitors will also get a chance to learn more about King Ceretti and the Kramer family thanks to a couple of plaques on display near the entrance. Jodi King

Nature Center, continued on page 5....

2 Conservation News

Environmental Education Extern

Jasper County Conservation has a teacher extern working with us on EE programming again this summer. Iowa STEM Teacher Externships, a program of the Iowa Governor's STEM Advisory Council, is supported through state-appropriated funds and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Resource Enhancement and Protection Conservation Education Program (REAP-CEP) Grant for Teacher Externships with Environmental and Conservation Professionals, along with investments by Iowa business and industry partners. During the summer, educators work side-by-side with knowledgeable and skilled industry employees who help bring the classroom curriculum to life. Teacher Externships provide educators with the exposure to answer questions about real-world application, prepare students for careers they may have in the future, and improve educational experiences. Meet our 2026 Extern, Micaela Scott:

My name is Micaela Scott. I teach Talented and Gifted at Newton Community School District. This past school year marked my ninth year of teaching! I grew up in Newton, and I love living and working in my hometown and having opportunities to serve my community. When I am not teaching, I love spending time with my husband, stepdaughter, our dogs, and my other family members. I have had a couple of opportunities working in conservation. My first exposure was in the summer of 2016 when I was interning at Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge. Since then, I have taken environmental science courses for teachers and have worked to incorporate these lessons into my teaching.



This summer is my second time working as a teacher extern for Jasper County Conservation. I learned a lot the last time I worked here in the summer of 2024. I enjoyed helping with summer camps, writing a grant for a school garden at Berg Middle School, and taking back ideas for

my class. This summer, I am excited to work in the new Dana King Ceretti Environmental Education Center. I am eager to help get some small educational events planned for kids to enjoy at the education center during the day. I also plan to help organize different monthly themes for visitors to enjoy independently in the education center. I am looking forward to having another wonderful summer with Jasper County Conservation!

Meet Our Summer Intern, Collin

My name is Collin Buchli, and I am working as a seasonal employee for Jasper County Conservation. Outside of the summer, I am earning a degree in Biology at Central College, and I plan to pursue dentistry! In my free time, I enjoy playing music and distance running.



Growing up in Newton, I always enjoyed the outdoors and learning about nature and conservation efforts in Iowa. As a seasonal employee, I am excited to observe and participate in some of these efforts before returning to school!

Meet Our Summer Student Volunteer, Delaney

I'm Delaney Woollums! This is my second summer volunteering with the Jasper County Naturalists, where I'll have the pleasure of helping at (almost) all of their summer camps! I just finished my first year at Iowa State as a Wildlife and Fisheries Conservation and Ecology major and hope to pursue a career in conservation.

Outside of summer camps, I've been staying busy helping licensed bird bander Bob Van Ersvelde conduct summer research. The MAPS

program (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship) spans the entire summer and helps determine trends in US bird populations. Bob is the only bander in Iowa who partakes in the MAPS program, and it is an honor to be a part of it!



Park Updates

Below: Conservation Staff have been working hard to construct a new boat ramp for park users at Roorda Wildlife Area. The bottom part of the ramp was poured last winter, and the top portion was finished this spring. Boats can now easily access the lake. Let the fishing commence!



Below: We have great news! The Mariposa Park hiking trail has finally been repaired after damage that was caused by storms in 2024. Many of you have asked about this project and we are happy to report that trail hiking can resume completely around the park now.



Nature Center Hours and Exhibits

We are still working on many projects at the Dana King Ceretti Environmental Education Center but the building is open! Visitors of all ages can look forward to seeing activities centered on a monthly nature theme. For the month of June, the theme has been “Butterflies and Moths.” There are scavenger hunts for different ages, books to read, a self-led craft, items to look at through the microscopes, along with some live butterfly and moth displays to study.

The theme in July will be “Frogs and Toads,” in August we’ll focus on “Prairie Wildflowers” and in September we’ll get squirrely with “Squirrels and Acorns.”

Families with kids in kindergarten-6th grade are invited to come for special themed story hours throughout the summer as well (see event information below). Programs will be about 40 minutes long and will include a story and activity. Please watch our Facebook page for updates @JasperCountyConservation.

Guest hours at the nature center will be M-F, 10:00am-4:00pm and Saturdays from 9:00am-12:00pm. The Environmental Education center is located at 5284 Liberty Ave., Newton.

Story Times at the Nature Center

- Monday, July 6: “Noticing Nature”**
- Monday, July 13: “Frogs and Toads”**
- Monday, July 20: “Birds”**
- Monday, July 27: “Praying Mantises”**
- Monday, August 3: “Geology Rocks”**
- Monday, August 10: “Prairie Wildflowers”**
- Monday, August 17: “Snakes”**

**All programs repeat at 10:00 AM and 2:00 PM
Dana King Ceretti Environmental Education
Center, 5284 Liberty Ave., Newton**

Join one of our staff or volunteers for a themed story time and activity that will last around 40 minutes long. These programs are for kids in kindergarten through 6th grade. Two times are offered for each program at 10:00am OR 2:00pm.

Shelter House Reservations

Did you know that shelter houses located in Jasper County parks can be reserved for \$25 per day? Shelters are located at Ashton Wildwood Park, Mariposa Recreation Area, Jacob Krumm Nature Preserve, Uhlenhopp Arboretum, Reimer Refuge, Wagaman Mill, Kramer Park and the Chichaqua Valley Recreation Trail. Go to my-countyparks.com to make your reservation.

4 Upcoming Events/Programs

Preschool Storytimes

Thurs., June 25, 10:30 AM: "Butterflies"
Thurs., July 23, 10:30 AM: "Frogs and Toads"
Wed., August 26, 10:30 AM: "Wildflowers"
Dana King Ceretti Environmental Education
Center, 5284 Liberty Ave., Newton



Special guests will be hosting Preschool Storytimes at the new nature center. Join us for nature stories and a craft, and see the new facility!

Older, Wiser, Livelier Seniors (OWLS)

Second Wed. of the month, 10:00–11:00 AM
Dana King Ceretti Environmental Education
Center, 5284 Liberty Ave., Newton

Come for coffee and a short presentation. All programs are from 10:00-11:00 AM unless otherwise noted.

July 8—Nature Center Tour

Naturalists will give an informal tour of the new environmental education center, talking about the development of the area and presenting future projects that are still being fundraised for.

50th Anniversary of Jacob Krumm

Nature Preserve Hike and Paddle

Friday, July 10, 6:30-8:30pm
Jacob Krumm Nature Preserve
15148 Jacob Ave., Grinnell

Help celebrate the 50th Anniversary of Krumm Preserve by enjoying the park with some naturalist-led activities. Participants can paddle kayaks or paddleboards around the lake, go on a naturalist-led prairie walk, and/or hike the trails on your own.

UTV Tours

Jasper County Conservation is providing UTV tours at Uhlenhopp Arboretum and Jacob Krumm Nature Preserve to view the beauty of our natural areas.

Tours are 1 hour long and can accommodate up to 4 people. Please call (641) 792-9780 for specific time listings and to reserve a spot!

Tours at Jacob Krumm Nature Preserve will be July 15 and 18. Krumm Preserve is located at 15148 Jacob Ave., Grinnell, IA 50112.

Hunter Education Course

Wednesday, July 29, 8:30 AM - 3:00 PM
Thursday, July 30, 8:30 AM - 3:00 PM

(students must attend both sessions)

Izaak Walton League Clubhouse, Newton

This course will be offered by the Jasper County Conservation Board and the Emerson Hough Chapter of the Izaak Walton League. Students must attend both sessions to receive certification. Students need to pre-register for this course online at www.gooutdoorsiowa.com.

The hunter education course is free and all materials will be provided. Persons must be at least 12 years old to take the course. Students should bring a sack lunch both days.



Paper Quilling

Thursday, August 6, 10:00 AM-12:00 PM and
1:00-3:00 PM

Dana King Ceretti Environmental Education
Center, 5284 Liberty Ave., Newton

Learn more about the art of paper quilling with Heidi Holley and work on your own special project to keep. The theme at the nature center in August is "Prairie Wildflowers"—participants will work on making quilled flowers to place on a greeting card. Please choose between either the 10:00 AM time OR the 1:00 PM time.

Off the Beaten Path Trail Race

Saturday, September 19, 9:00 AM
Jacob Krumm Nature Preserve

Check-in and day-of registration for the 21st annual trail race will begin at 8:00AM at Ahrens Access of the preserve. The 6K trail race will kick off at 9:00AM and the 3K fun run will begin at 9:15AM.

Further information, including pre-registration forms and directions to Jacob Krumm Preserve, will be at www.jaspercountyconservation.com and on Jasper County Conservation's Facebook page. Proceeds from the trail race and will benefit our non-profit group, Jasper Conservation Connection.



Nature Center, continued from page 1....

said it is “so heartwarming” to see them share a wall with each other.

“Carol was her school teacher in sixth grade, and they just remained friends,” Jodi King said to Newton News following the ribbon cutting, which was heavily attended by community members. “Now Kramer Park is here and Dana’s name is on the building and they still have this connection. It’s just a lovely thing.”



Above: Carol Kramer, a longtime member of the Jasper County Conservation Board, has been such a devoted supporter of the nature center that she has a classroom named after her.

As people become more and more attached to technology and the virtual world, Jeff King said people also become less and less aware of how beautiful the real world truly is. He thinks the nature center will serve as that connection and ground visitors in the beauty and importance of nature.

“If we can educate the young people that are going to be coming through here for all of the classes and the field trips and everything else, that’s just laying a legacy for future generations,”



Above: Jeff and Jodi King are the parents of Dana King Ceretti. The nature center has been named after her.

Jeff King said. “To me, that’s where the real value is. You can see the community support. People have stepped up and took this to heart.”

Keri Van Zante, director of Jasper County Conservation, said it was emotional to see so many people turn out for the nature center ribbon cutting. All of the staff members at conservation, she said, have worked on the nature center at some point in their careers. Van Zante is thankful the community made it happen.

“They really funded this whole vision, and they’re still funding it,” Van Zante said. “We’ve had lots of people here wanting to fund additional parts of it.”

Perhaps what the nature center does most for conservation staff is create more opportunities; more opportunities to fish, to hike and to learn. It also amplifies conservation’s ability to reach more people.

“It’s really exciting to see people are going, ‘Wow, they’re really doing something cool that interests me,’ and hopefully this brings in more people that we haven’t got to meet before,” Van Zante said. “We have events and summer camps and do all these different things that touch different kinds of people and interests.”

While conservation has finally met one of its biggest goals it has ever set, Van Zante insists the work isn’t over and there is certainly more to come. Exhibits, permanent education items, a finished basement, the list goes on.

“It’s just so exciting. I started in 2005 and the conservation board said, ‘This is something we want you to do. You don’t have to do it right now but figure out how to get this done,’” Van Zante said of her direction to pursue the nature center. “It has taken a long time ... Jasper County should be proud.”



Above: From left: Liz Ventling, Katie Cantu, Keri Van Zante, Greg Oldsen and Ethan Vander Pol all work for the Jasper County Conservation Board.

Jasper County Conservation Board
5284 Liberty Ave.
Newton, IA 50208

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**JASPER COUNTY
CONSERVATION**

Jasper County Conservation Board

M - F: 10:00 - 4:00 Sat: 9:00 - 12:00
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A Big Thank You To...

Ina Heidemann for her donations to the educational program, Brad Van Zante for providing UTV tours, Heidi Holley, Glenda Duffus, Mark Pollastrini, Pam and Andy Stone and the Lynnville Historical Society for volunteering their time to help with school field trips and all our volunteers who helped provide food and help at the nature center ribbon cutting. Thank you!!

We've Moved!

Jasper County Conservation offices have been moved to the Dana King Ceretti Environmental Education Center, located in Kramer Park, 5284 Liberty Ave., Newton. A grand opening for the center is being planned for later in 2026 when the Geisler-Penquite Land Stewardship Lab and the Curt Jackson Classroom are finished.

Jasper County Conservation Board's programs are consistent with pertinent federal and state laws and regulations on nondiscrimination regarding race, color, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identification, age and handicap. If anyone believes they have been subjected to discrimination, they may file a complaint with the Jasper County Conservation Board or the Office of Equal Opportunity, Washington, D.C. 29240