



# The Jasper County Jewel

Jasper County Conservation Board Quarterly Newsletter

Winter 2025

## Local Entities Benefit From Newton Man's \$1.4M Memorial Trust

By Christopher Braunschweig, Newton News  
October 16, 2025

Curt Jackson sold his family farm in Newton for \$8,000 several decades ago, and under the direction of a financial advisor, he invested it all into a little company known as Apple, and it was thanks to this decision that he was able to accumulate a large sum of funds that have now been donated to several entities.

Four organizations in Newton have been awarded portions of a more than \$1.4 million gift from Jackson, a lifelong Jasper County resident who died in March. Newton Public Library and Newton YMCA will receive \$40,000 each, Newton Parks & Recreation will receive \$125,000 and Jasper County Conservation will receive more than \$1.2 million towards its nature center, making it the largest single contribution the project has ever seen.

Keri Van Zante, Director of Jasper County Conservation, said the gift will help finish the basement classrooms and the construction of a handicap-accessible dock as initial projects. Public and private partnerships like these, she said, improve the quality of life and well-being in the community. The donation *will* make a difference.

"Jasper County Conservation staff and board members are so very proud that Curt and his family chose to entrust us with this gift," Van Zante said to Newton News. "We know we will make him proud by creating an education center that will provide opportunities for youth and adults for so many years to come."

Jane Meyer, of Longmont, Colo., said her uncle was a bachelor his whole life, so his nieces and nephews were his children. Meyer said Clifford Curtis Jackson was the youngest of three brothers: Robert, or "Bob," was the oldest

and Harold, known as "Tiny," was the middle brother. They all grew up in Newton. "We all grew up born and raised in Newton," Meyer said. "Curt spent four years in the Army but was back in Newton for the rest of his life."

Jackson worked as a machinist and foreman at Maytag until his retirement, but prior to that he had tried farming for a few years. Despite his investment with Apple, Meyer said Jackson lived a very frugal lifestyle, which allowed him to accumulate a significant fund set up to support several local and state causes.

He spent many hours at the Newton Public Library reading the Wall Street Journal, The New York Times and other newspapers. He also devoured news and financial programming on TV. His obituary said: "Unbeknownst to most people, Curt was one of the best-informed citizens in Jas-

*Jackson, continued on page 4....*



*Above:* Clifford Curtis Jackson, of Newton, left behind a trust after he died in March. Portions of the trust were given to a number of local entities, like Jasper County Conservation, Newton YMCA, Newton Public Library and Newton Parks & Recreation. (Provided by Jane Meyer)

### Meet Thad Nearmyer, JCC Board Member

My name is Thad Nearmyer. I was appointed to the Jasper County Conservation Board in September of 2025. I have also served on the Jasper County Board of Supervisors since November of 2024.

My wife Jodi and I live on our family farm about two miles north of Monroe where we custom feed hogs and have a cow-calf herd. I worked off the farm for several years at Principal Financial Group where I developed leadership skills that I use today in public office.

I believe Jasper County Conservation has many great parks, exciting trails and wonderful education programs that reach students from all around the county. Growing up in Jasper County, I remember field trips to Mariposa and Ashton parks as a student at Monroe Elementary. I understand the importance of these programs. As a farmer, I have the opportunity to spend a lot of time outdoors and have developed a sincere admiration and appreciation of nature. I also am deeply interested in soil conservation.

My goal as a member of the Jasper County Conservation Board, as well as the Jasper County Board of Supervisors, is to open the lines of communication between the two boards. We should be able to develop some shared achievable goals that will benefit the citizens of Jasper County.



*Above:* Thad Nearmyer of Monroe is serving on the Jasper County Conservation Board.

*Right:* Liz Ventling, who was a graduate of Newton Community Schools, has begun as the new Naturalist/Admin Assistant.

### Meet Liz Ventling, New Naturalist/Admin Assistant

Hello! My name is Liz and I am Jasper County Conservation's new Naturalist/Admin Assistant.

I grew up in Newton, Iowa where I created many fond memories in my backyard and at the Izaak Walton League. I was happiest exploring a pond, catching frogs, digging up worms, or searching for insects. My curiosity and love for the natural world continued to intensify as I grew up, which ultimately led me to pursue a bachelor's degree in environmental science from the University of Iowa.

During my time in college, I was a Field Assistant on a small mammals of Iowa research project and a Tree Surveyor investigating the impacts of the 2020 derecho. I graduated from the University of Iowa in May 2022 and had the opportunity to be a Seasonal Naturalist Intern at Johnson County Conservation.

My internship led into an eleven-month Ameri-corps position through Bur Oak Land Trust where I served as a Conservation Education Assistant back at Johnson County Conservation. During that time, I regularly led field trip groups, created and implemented new environmental education programs, and created social media content.

Over the past few years since then, I have gained valuable experience with event and program coordination working as a Program Coordinator at the Coralville Community Food Pantry and Parks and Rec Specialist for the City of Newton.

Now I have the opportunity to return to conservation work and share my love for the outdoors with my hometown and nearby communities. In my new role, I am most excited about connecting people to the natural world around them and fostering a love and appreciation for it. I am eager to continue growing and learning from the experienced staff here at Jasper County Conservation.



## 21st Annual Trail Race Results

Jasper Conservation Connection organized it's 21st Annual Off the Beaten Path trail race and fun run at Jacob Krumm Nature Preserve with about 60 participants competing on Saturday, September 20th. Thank you to all of our volunteers and race participants!

Overall winner of the 3K was Weston Duke, age 12, with a time of 12.29. The 6K winner was Jon Duke, age 41, with a time of 24.01. To round off the family of runners, Susie Duke placed 2nd in the 6K with a time of 24.49!

Race times are posted on our website at [www.jaspercountyconservation.com](http://www.jaspercountyconservation.com). We hope to see you all again next year!



*Right: Jon, Susie and Weston Duke, winners of the Off The Beaten Path Trail race at Krumm Preserve.*

## Older, Wiser, Livelier Seniors (OWLS)

**Jasper County Conservation Office,  
1030 W. 2nd St. S., Newton**

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

### **Jan. 14—Bat Conservation in Iowa**

Jessica Riebkes Clough, Land Conservation Specialist at Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, will share about the bats of Iowa, protecting and managing land for bats, and how you can help the bats in your neck of the woods!

### **Feb. 11—"Weather 101: Understanding Forecasts & Warnings"**

Jamey Robinson, Director of Jasper County Emergency Management, will provide a simple guide to reading weather forecasts, understanding the differences between watches and warnings, and interpreting weather maps. Participants will learn how to stay informed during severe weather and practical safety tips for preparedness.



## Ski & Snowshoe

Between moving into our new nature center and whatever the weather decides to do, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing will most likely be "pop-up" programs this winter with shorter notice. We also will need to wait until the holiday lights are taken down at Maytag Park to hold events there.

Please follow our Facebook page @Jasper County Conservation for event information or call (641) 792-9780.



## Youth Fishing Club

**Monday, January 12, 5:30-7:30 PM**

**Monday, February 9, 5:30-7:30 PM**

**\*\*Ice Fishing TBA**

**Newton Izaak Walton League**

**889 Hwy. F-36 W, Newton**

The Jasper County Youth Fishing Club will hold monthly meetings this winter, focusing on ice fishing, making ice fishing jigs, and learning about fish taxidermy from a local taxidermist.

This group is for Jasper County youth in grades 3-12. Please contact Greg Oldsen for more information at [goldsen@jasperia.org](mailto:goldsen@jasperia.org).

You can also follow the group's Facebook page @Jasper County Youth Fishing Club.



## Upcoming Maple Syrup Season

Our staff is excited for the 2026 maple syrup season. The Sugar Shack will be open to the public during operation hours for a short tour and explanation of the process. Open house times and other updates are posted on our Facebook page, @jaspercountyconservation. Typically the season runs from late February to mid-March but it will be weather-dependent.

Once production starts, Uncle Jake's Pure Maple Syrup will be for sale at our office while supplies last. Also check out our Sugar Shack t-shirts we have for sale! They are \$15/each. We look forward to a good year and hope to see you out there!





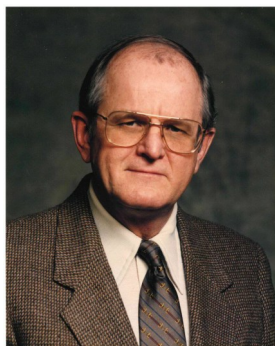
*Jackson, continued from page 1....*

per County.”

Meyer said Jackson did not travel much, but one of his favorite pastimes was going to Kinnick Stadium with some of his buddies to watch the Iowa Hawkeye football games. Jackson eventually moved to Park Centre in 2023 and endeared the staff and his fellow residents with his dry sense of humor. Jackson passed away on March 1 at the age of 88.

Meyer is one of the trustees of the Curt Jackson Trust, which dictated that portions go towards the Stead Family Children's Hospital in Iowa City, cancer research at the University of Iowa and other similar foundations. He also wanted to see funding go towards local entities in Newton and Jasper County. “I was given the ability to decide exactly where to give his money,” Meyer said. “When I was in Newton this past June, I met with the library, the city, the YMCA and Jasper County Conservation. I met with all of them and they talked to me about the projects they had going.”

From there it was deciding which projects Jackson would have liked to see his money go towards. Meyer expects her uncle would be proud of the selections. “I think Curt would have very much appreciated and enjoyed where his money has gone and what it is working for,” Meyer said.



*Above:* These stunning blank greeting cards are for sale at the conservation office, only \$15/package, and feature winning photos from our photo contest! More information is at [www.jaspercountyconservation.com](http://www.jaspercountyconservation.com) or call (641) 792-9780.

## **Celebrate your Love of the Land**

### **Make a Gift to Jasper County Conservation**

**Celebrate the people in your life who have instilled a lasting love of wild places. Make a tribute gift to Jasper County Conservation today!**

Since 1962, Jasper County Conservation has protected over 3,000 acres of local prairies, woodlands, wetlands, lakes, rivers and streams, and has created almost 40 miles of trails. Our dedicated education staff meet with over 15,000 children and adults each year to teach about the outdoors. At the heart of our mission are people who love the outdoors. People like you!

Whether your gift signifies your love of nature, or is a way of remembering a loved one, it will support the ongoing protection, restoration and exploration of special places right here in Jasper County. You can even choose to direct your gift to a specific project or program. Build on the legacy of the nature lover in your life by protecting more of the places you both love - for the land, water, wildlife, education, and future generations of outdoor enthusiasts.

Want us to notify your honoree for the holidays? Include your honoree's name and address and we'll mail them a personal Christmas card sharing your special donation! Your honoree's name will also appear in the Spring 2026 issue of The Jasper County Jewel newsletter if you desire.

For more information, contact the Jasper County Conservation office at (641) 792-9780 or stop by and see us at 1030 W 2<sup>nd</sup> St. S in Newton.



## **As the new year approaches, are you making resolutions to:**

- Get involved with a group that is making a difference locally ● Donate to a great cause ● Help protect wildlife and take care of the environment
  - Stay active and young at heart
- Learn new things ● Spend more time outdoors
  - Meet new people ● Have fun!

Please consider volunteering with Jasper County Conservation and joining our nonprofit group, Jasper Conservation Connection! We would love to add you to our dynamic group of supporters. Contact our office by phone or email to learn more about the opportunities available.

## Volunteer Spotlight

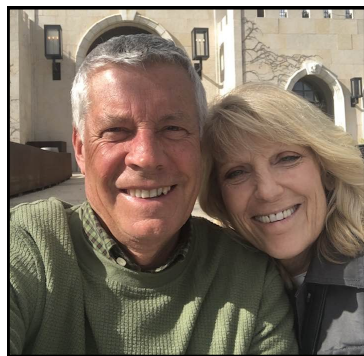
We would like to recognize Mark Pollastrini as our Jasper County Conservation Volunteer of the Year! We, of course, knew Mark when he taught 7th grade science at Berg Middle School, and now he has been joining our staff to help lead school field trips.

Mark helped last spring with Newton 2nd grade field trips, leading the pondnetting stations at Jacob Krumm Nature Preserve and then again pondnetting in the fall with Newton 7th graders at Mariposa Park. Former students of his were delighted to see him at the parks leading activities for their young students. Mark also lead archery for the Lynnville-Sully 5th grade School of the Wild classes at Krumm Preserve.

Mark is an active board member for our non-profit group, Jasper Conservation Connection, and has taught at our hunter education classes in Newton for many years. Thank you Mark for everything that you do for Jasper County Conservation—we are lucky to have you!



*Above:* Conservation's Volunteer of the Year, Mark Pollastrini, helping 5th grade students shoot bows on a field trip.



*Left:* Mark and his wife Cindy Pollastrini, both retired teachers in Newton, have participated in Jasper County Conservation field trips with their students over the years.

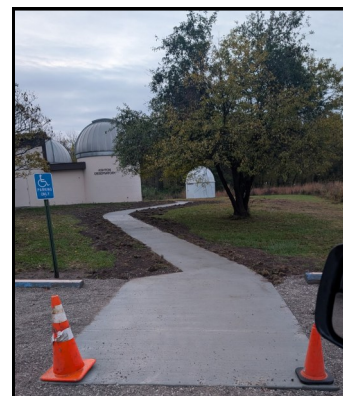
## What's Happening Around the County

Lots of projects are being completed all around Jasper County! Here are photos of a few:



*Left:* The two new picnic shelters at Ashton Wildwood Park had their finishing touches added. One shelter is in the campground and another is near the nature trail.

*Right:* A sidewalk was poured from the Ashton Observatory parking lot to the main entrance, making the building more accessible for all.



*Left:* A new concrete boat ramp was poured at Roorda Wildlife Area, west of Monroe. It will replace the gravel access currently there. Additionally, repairs to the dam will return the water to its original depth as it is currently about 3 ft low due to last summers torrential rains!



*Above:* Work continues on the nature center building. We still do not have a date for when it will be open to the public! We hope it is very soon—stay tuned!



Jasper County Conservation Board  
1030 W. 2nd St. S.  
Newton, IA 50208

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**Jasper County Conservation Board**

M - F 8:00 - 4:00 (641) 792-9780  
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website: [www.jaspercountyconservation.com](http://www.jaspercountyconservation.com)

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Ethan Vander Pol.....Maintenance Technician  
Tristan Hunt.....Maintenance Technician  
Jacob Arrowood.....Maintenance Technician

**Special thanks this past fall for....**volunteering and donations from Willie Yeager, Ina Heide-mann, Andy and Pam Stone, Bill Yeager, the Em-erson Hough Chapter of the Izaak Walton League, and to Brad Van Zante for driving the UTV tours. Thanks to all our wonderful volun-teers who presented for the OWLS group and who helped with the trail race and many fall field trips! Thanks also to our amazing Youth Fishing Club donors!

**THANK YOU!**



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. 20240