

The Optimist

Fall 2023



INDIANHEAD

LEHIGH

NEWS

Backyard Chicken-Keeping in the Nenes

Text and photos by Ceci Michelotti

One afternoon several months ago, I was in my kitchen on East Indianhead and heard a loud chicken ruckus. Thinking it was my chickens who were foraging in the wooded area in my backyard, I went outside to check on them. When I entered the yard, my chickens came running to me from the woods, but the ruckus continued. As I investigated further, I realized my neighbor had gotten chickens, and they were being quite vocal. My



Aunt Bea is a Plymouth Barred Rock.

Happening Soon

Sat, Oct 28, 4:30 Nene Halloweenee

Sat, Nov 4, 8:00 Yard Sale

Sat, Nov 4, 2:00 General Meeting
and Turtle Talk

neighbors had joined the several households in Indianhead–Lehigh who are raising chickens in their backyard.

My family began with four baby chicks in March 2017. Over the years, we have had a total of eleven chickens, almost all different breeds, and all with different personalities and quirks. It has been a joy to raise and spend time with them, but it is sometimes as challenging as it is rewarding. If you've been curious about what is involved in sharing your backyard with these silly birds, please read on for some basic information on keeping chickens.

Choosing Breeds and Birds

There are several places in this area where you can get chickens, whether you want to raise them from day-old babies or skip that part and go straight to pullets that are about to begin laying eggs (teenage chickens). You often can find people who are rehoming or selling adult laying hens and roosters on various Facebook poultry groups or at farm

swaps (see information about this in the resource section). A popular place to get chicks is Woodville Ace Hardware. The store starts getting day-old chicks in February and has new ones every week until May or June.



Sparrow is a 6yo Wellsummer.

You can check the Woodville Ace Chicken Blog to see what breeds are coming in each week and pre-order the ones you want. Tractor Supply has chicks twice a year. In addition, there are several breeders in this area if you don't want farm store chicks that have been shipped in the mail from a large national breeder. There are lots of good reasons to buy local, namely the health of the birds and more humane practices.

I prefer to raise my hens from the time they are a day old, mostly because there is nothing cuter than a baby animal, and chicks are no exception. They are silly and fun and snuggly, all of which totally makes up for the constant pooping, adapting their brooder setup as they grow, and the increased need for attention and care. I also have found that raising them from chicks has led to very friendly adult hens in my flock.

Because we live in Florida, with mild winters and blazing hot summers, it's important to get breeds that are more suited for this climate. Chickens release heat through their combs, so breeds with a large comb tend to fare better here. Some breeds are bigger and fluffier than others, and may have more

difficulty staying cool in summer. In addition to climate tolerance, chickens also are chosen based on other breed traits, such as personality, color of eggs, frequency of egg laying, temperament, and feather patterns. The sweetest girl I ever had was a Buff Orpington, but she also went broody a lot (meaning she desperately wanted to hatch her eggs and be a mom), which sadly also led to her death when she tried to protect her eggs from an Oak Snake and lost. More about predators and losing chickens later. Spoiler alert: it's the saddest and hardest part of keeping chickens.



Ceci with Burnie, who is an Ameraucana

Housing

The coop is where the chickens sleep at night and lay their eggs. The coop should be big enough for the number of chickens you have (for a small flock in our neighborhood, a good starting point is four square feet per chicken).

The run is where they spend their time during the day when they aren't free ranging (amok in your yard). The run also should be a decent size—a minimum of ten square feet per chicken is commonly advised, but I personally think that for chickens to have a good life, it should be as large as you have space for or can afford.

Based on my experience, here are some important things to consider.

- **Personal space** for the birds. They have different personalities and different individual requirements.
- **Access** to a feeder and waterer, and being able to put them where the birds will not poop in them when they roost.
- **Roost spacing.** They not only need enough room to sleep on the roost, but they also need enough room to spread their wings and fly up to the roost and to sort out who gets to sleep next to whom and who gets the prime spots once they get on the roost. They need room to fly down without bumping into feeders, waterers, nesting boxes, or a wall. Choosing the roosting spot can be a high drama event each night, which is entertaining, but it can increase stress if there is lack of space.
- **Poop load.** The larger area they have, the less often you have to actively manage the poop. I use pine shavings on the floor of the coop, which is raised so I don't have to bend over too far to scoop it every now and then. Ideally, you want a setup in which you have to fully clean out the coop as seldom as possible while maintaining hygiene. In addition, my run is huge so I never have issues with too much poop and flies.
- **Free range.** How often are they able to get out of the run? This may depend on weather, your work schedule, when you are able to turn them loose, what time of day you open the coop door to let them out or lock them up at night, and so forth. The more they free range, the less pressure on the size of the run.
- What is the **maximum number** of chickens you will have? Chicken math is real—once you experience the joys of raising them, you inevitably will end up with more than you expected. Look down the road a bit. The more space you have, the easier it is to integrate chickens. Chickens have developed a way to live together in a flock called the pecking order. Establishing that pecking order sometimes can be pretty violent. It's essential for the weaker chickens to have space to run away from the more dominant chickens.

Another aspect of the coop is how you plan to open it in the morning and close it at night. Chickens automatically go into their coop at night, and then the door needs to be closed to protect from predators. For years I did this myself, opening the door when the sun rose and closing it when it set at night. For obvious reasons, this is one of the more challenging aspects of having chickens—they rely on you for safety every single day. If you miss one night of closing the coop, it could mean tragedy for your flock. In addition to people in the neighborhood who are chicken friends and willing to help, the addition of an automatic coop door has enhanced my life. I highly encourage looking into this option from the beginning.



The run, and the coop inside

Predators

Our neighborhood has a number of predators with which bird owners must contend. I have lost chickens to raccoons, a hawk, and a snake—all of which could have been prevented. For me, there is no worse feeling in raising chickens than when one of my girls dies a preventable death.

When planning your coop/run setup, you must think about making everything predator-proof. That means using 1/4 to 1/2-inch hardware cloth to enclose it to prevent snakes from getting in and other animals from being able to rip through chicken wire. Also, chicken wire rusts and can get big holes in it, while hardware cloth is much more durable. Connie Bersok, our lovely Indianhead neighbor who helps me with my chickens when I'm out of town,

discovered an area of my large run where the chicken wire had rusted, and raccoons were getting in at night. Because my large run is so big, I do use chicken wire around the sides and in an “apron” all around the outside perimeter, and bird netting for the roof—so the only predator I am avoiding is hawks. I also have a smaller inner run that is fully hardware cloth all around, reinforced with trim, and chicken wire on top sewn together at the seams with more wire. That run should be completely raccoon-proof and hawk-proof, and likely snake-proof as well. Do not underestimate the determination of predators, and do not overestimate your attempts to keep them away.

In addition to a predator-proof run and coop setup, I make sure I am home when I let my chickens free-range. This way I can be alert for any danger they may encounter, and they will let me know by making warning calls or generally freaking out. They **love** to be in the yard, scratching around for bugs and who knows what else. Chickens are curious and eager to see what their friend found, and often all will spontaneously run from one part of the yard to another, with no noticeable communication or reason. They love to take dust baths, which keep them clean and cool and reduce mites, so having an area with dirt is important. They also love to sunbathe, which is a sight to behold.



Moira Rose is a Columbian Rock.

See more chicken photos on page 17.

Feed

One of my favorite things in the world is watching my hens run toward me for treats. (Chickens running is hilarious. Google it.) A common benefit of having chickens is disposing of leftovers and food waste (obviously nothing rotten or past date). Chickens love greens, veggie scraps, tomatoes, corn, sunflower seeds, mealworms, and similar items. Mine are picky and will turn their beak up at leftover salad greens, yet they will fight each other for any protein-based treat. Chickens should be fed treats sparingly, and the majority of their nutrition should come from a formulated chicken feed, such as Purina Layer Pellets. There are several chicken feed options at the farm supply stores around town, including organic chicken feeds.

There's No End

Raising chickens is one of the most entertaining and joyful experiences I have had with animals. It's so peaceful to sit outside with them on a nice day, listening to their various chicken noises and watching their antics. One of my chickens, Burnie will always climb into my lap, and her little body melts with relaxation as she takes a nap snuggled under my arm. They are truly enjoyable companions—the fresh, delicious eggs are just an added bonus! If you ever have any questions, please reach out! You can reach me at cecilemich@gmail.com. I'm including some resources below.

- BackyardChickens.com
- [Fresh Eggs Daily blog](#)
- [Under the Henfluence \(on Substack\)](#)
- National Facebook groups
 - [Fresh Eggs Daily with Lisa Steele](#)
 - [Best Little Henhouse in Oregon](#)
- Tallahassee area (search within Facebook)
 - Indianhead/Lehigh Chicken People (just for our neighborhood)
 - Monticello Florida Farm Equipment, Supplies and Services
 - Woodville Ace Chicken Group
 - Thomasville Ga. Farm Swap
 - Tallahassee Backyard Poultry and Farm Club

News & Notes

Nene Halloween

Saturday, October 28 • 4:30 pm to 7 pm • Optimist Park

Plans for the annual Nene Halloween party are underway. Gin up some spooky recipes for your potluck dish! Keep in mind these contest categories as you plan your costume!



- Best duo/group
- Best babies and tots 0-3
- Best dressed pet
- Most sustainable/creative/upcycled/recycled
- Best traditional Halloween

Watch the Indianhead Lehigh Community Facebook page and your email for details. Participating in this event is the best way to ensure your costume is ready for the big day!

Fall Indianhead-Lehigh Yard Sale

Saturday, November 4 • 8 am to noon • Optimist Park

By popular demand, we are hosting a neighborhood yard sale at Optimist Park on Saturday November 4th from 8 am to noon. In Nene Land, where neighbors are full of vim and vigor, spring cleaning apparently also happens in the Fall! ☺

Participation as a seller is free for folks who have paid their 2023 IHLNA dues and \$10 for non-members. The Neighborhood Association will post on Craigslist, and also create a public Facebook post that can be shared more widely. For questions, contact us at indianheadlehighna@gmail.com.

IHLNA General Meeting, with Turtles!

Saturday, November 4 • 2:00 pm • Optimist Park

Indianhead-Lehigh neighbors are encouraged to attend the Neighborhood Association General Meeting on November 4. During the General Meeting, board vacancies are filled and neighbors have an opportunity to share suggestions and concerns relating to the neighborhood. Any member of the Neighborhood Association may self-nominate or be nominated by a board member. To learn about board participation, which involves a renewable, two-year term of office, or to propose a topic for the

meeting agenda, contact the neighborhood association Board of Directors at indianheadlehighna@gmail.com.

As a special addition to the General Meeting, we will hear a presentation by longtime Indianhead resident Dave Almquist. An invertebrate zoologist at Florida State University, Dave began a project to catalog the numerous sightings of box turtles in the Nenes. Come learn about Dave's findings at this annual General Meeting.

Fruit Tree Thank-You

The Indianhead-Lehigh Neighborhood Association (IHLNA) thanks all the neighbors who made its fruit tree project a blooming success.

It began with the donation, labor, and education by Jamake and Marlee Robinson, IHLNA neighbors and proprietors of Just Fruits and Exotics, a family-owned business in Crawfordville for more than forty years.

The project team found three areas in which to plant young trees. All needed constant watering for the first several months after planting. For two of the locations, the volunteers had to haul water to the trees.

- The greenway area where Ostin Nene meets W Indianhead Dr was nurtured by Kristina Samuels and Rick Groshong.
- The Optimist Park location had the expertise of Connie Bersok, Angel Eason, and Ryan Wilke.
- Finally, the end of Nancy Drive was pampered by Chrissy Gest, Anna Lomasney, and Edward Acoff.

The plum trees here are flourishing! On behalf of the IHLNA Board, thank you for your time, energy, and involvement.



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Hartsfield School News

Greetings to our wonderful learning community! Hartsfield is off to a great start this year with a new administration, highly anticipated International Baccalaureate Primary Years Program authorization visit in September, and bustling hallways with our returning learners.

Our new Principal is Mr. John T. Olson, and our Assistant Principal, Ms. Yashica Washington, is off to her second full year in the role. We welcomed a host of new faculty so there are many new, fresh faces on campus. Additionally, we're so thrilled to have welcomed many families from the neighborhood into the Hartsfield family. We look forward to serving our community again this year and thank you for your continued support. If you haven't visited us in a while, please stop by to see our journey and consider becoming involved as a volunteer. We hope to see you soon!

Final Friday Parties in the 'Hood Resume

Experience the vibrant camaraderie of the Indianhead-Lehigh neighborhood through the Nene Final Friday parties!

Each last Friday of the month, from September to May, a different neighbor hosts a casual get-together at their home. These typically feature a potluck dinner and music. The gatherings are a fantastic way to unwind, catch up with friends, meet new neighbors, and enjoy the company of our diverse community.

To sign up to be a Nene Final Friday host or to find out when and where the next party will be held, email Molly Jameson at mcjam88@gmail.com. Information about upcoming parties also will be posted to the Indianhead-Lehigh Community Facebook page.

Campaign Refund Program Benefits All

By Ernie Paine

Support the candidate of your choice, and get a refund in the process!

In 2014, a voter referendum created the Tallahassee Independent Ethics Board. As part of this initiative, the City Charter now provides for a refund of contributions made to the campaigns of **candidates for City Commission and/or Mayor**, up to a maximum of \$25.00. Details can be found at <https://www.talgov.com/Main/ethics> – click on Campaign Contribution Refund Program.

The intent of this policy is to lessen the influence of “big money” in city politics. A larger number of smaller contributions can have a big effect on an election. Just ask Barack Obama! It will allow those who want to participate in the electoral process, but who don't necessarily have the deep pockets of major developers and business interests, a chance to show their support for the candidate(s) of their choice, with little to no net cost to them. A donor's name will be listed on the Supervisor of Elections website as a supporter, and contributors can be sure that all candidates examine these lists carefully to see who is behind them.

The 2024 campaign season already has begun. As of press time, at least seven candidates have filed to run for the two city commission seats up for (re)election—those of Curtis Richardson and Jack Porter. Support them or those who are running against them, and get up to \$25 back for the effort!

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Neighbor to Neighbor in the Nenes: Our Future

By Betsy Tabac

I imagine that many Indianhead–Lehigh residents by now have heard of Neighbor to Neighbor in the Nenes (N3). We are the neighborhood’s aging in place organization. Our mission is to help elders stay in their home as long as possible as they age. We started providing services in 2018, and last year provided more than 400 episodes of non-medical assistance. Services are provided by neighborhood volunteers at no charge to recipients.

In a state like Florida that does not provide enough assistance for needy elders, organizations like N3 have an outsized role in the well-being of a community. Unfortunately, there are not many organizations like N3 in Florida (perhaps as few as seven), so the Indianhead community is unusual and special in its ability to help elders age in place.

We are able to do this because of broad community support for our service. However, there is one fly in the N3 ointment that threatens the long-term viability of the organization. The entity ultimately responsible for N3 is its board of directors. There currently are six board members who willingly devote several hours each month to keeping the organization functioning. The problem is that we need more people to join the board to do the work that boards do.

Board members normally do not interface directly with N3 clients, but rather concern themselves with policy-level decisions, fundraising, and working to keep the board itself strong and focused. (Long range planning is another major board function, but N3 has a plan in place through at least 2024, so work on that has been set aside for now.) A few individuals do provide direct services while also continuing with their board responsibilities, so both options are available to board volunteers.

Without a strong board, N3 easily could sink quietly into the sunset, especially now that some of the founding board members themselves are aging in place and, shall we say, experiencing the joys of aging.

The point is that we are asking for volunteers to serve on our board. You could consider starting by working on a committee, organizing educational programs, or coordinating some other administrative activity as a way to become more familiar with N3 and the responsibilities of a nonprofit board before officially joining the board.

For general information about nonprofit boards of directors, go to Board Source (boardsource.org). More importantly, contact N3 at 850-901-7818 or AgingInNeneland.org for more information and ways to volunteer. We need your unique talents and energy to sustain N3 as a vital neighborhood resource well into the future.

N3: Building Community

A resident on Chowkeebin Nene recently called N3 because she was worried about the older adult living next door to her. Before the pandemic, they had had frequent “over the fence” conversations and considered themselves friends. Now, the friend was not answering the phone or the door, and her mailbox was stuffed full.

N3 was able to reach an emergency contact person for the next-door neighbor. The emergency contact quickly assured us that the neighbor was okay, and we then were able to assure our caller that all was well. The emergency contact person was traveling to Tallahassee to visit her friend in the near future, and our caller planned to talk with her while she was in town and to her neighbor as soon as possible.

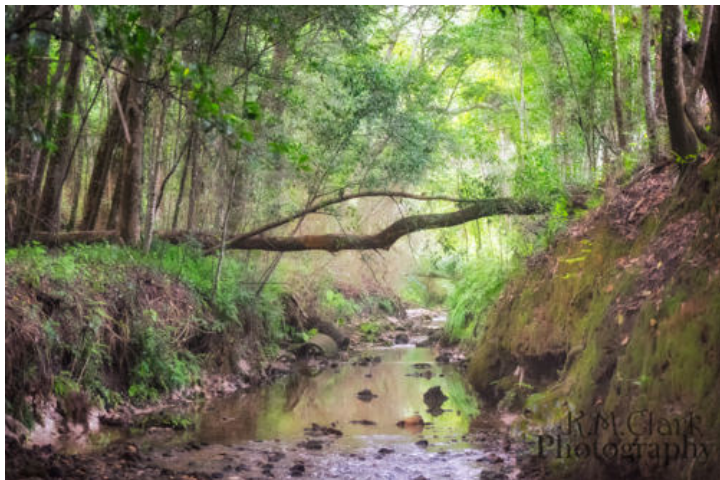
We love bringing neighbors together, and the community is the better for it.



Janice Hartwell is an N3 director since 2019. Photo from N3

Optimist Park

Poem and photo by K. M. Clark



Like spider webs
The arms of the trees
Reach out and protect
Over this treasure
Many hearts and souls
Gather in this park
Making memories
And throwing parties

It's Saturday!
Cake day!
All the picnic tables
Have bright boxes
And happy faces
Happy birthday
Can be heard
What a memory!

It's Sunday!
Fun day!
Tag you're it!
Chase you around the
park
Under the spider
Across the monkey
bars
And down the slide
Wheee!

It's Monday!
Hiking day
Apakin Nene stairs
Walk over the bridges
Be careful in the creek
Collect the clay
For many projects
Bowls!

It's Tuesday!
Pet day!
Leash on?
Leash off?
Throw the ball
In the field
Pet that dog
So soft!

It's Wednesday!
Sports day!
Throw the ball
Make a basket
Hit the volleyball
Over the net
Cheer for your team
"Go Team!"


It's Thursday!
Homeschool day!
Do you need
Any free items?
It's so nice to see
This group
Even just once a week
Everyone plays!

It's Friday!
Friends Day!
The park
Holds many memories
Of friendships
Of swings
And Florida Summers
played
Under the oak trees

IHLNA Financial Statement for 2022

Opening balance, January 1, 2022	\$12,988.94
Revenue	
IHLNA dues and donations	\$6,224.00
Nene Fest merchandise	\$2,898.29
Spring Optimist ads	\$225.00
Fall Optimist ads	\$380.00
Total Revenue:	\$9,727.29
Expenses	
Gandy Printers—Membership Flyer	-\$156.15
Spring Optimist	-\$887.20
Gandy Printers—Fall Optimist	-\$984.81
Auto Owners Insurance	-\$1,046.27
Florida Department of State	-\$61.25
PSG—Nene Fest stage	-\$1,476.00
City of Tallahassee—Nene Fest	-\$412.57
Homestead— Nene Fest merchandise	-\$1,369.48
Gulf Winds Track Club— equipment rental	-\$125.00
Hartsfield Resource Center	-\$2,000.00
Halloween Band	-\$400.00
Black's Ponies	-\$500.00
PayPal fees	-\$56.03
Neighbor to Neighbor donations	-\$2,060.00
Total Expenses:	-\$11,534.76
Closing Balance, December 31, 2022	\$11,181.47

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Skunkvine: Silent, Deadly

By Karla Brandt

It creeps across your lawn unnoticed. It may pop up under your azaleas. It winds up the stems of your shrubs and trees, and it will spread all over the tops. If it's not stopped, it will smother every shrub and tree in its path. It's very hard to obliterate. And, as if that isn't enough, it stinks.

Once you get to know skunkvine, you'll see it everywhere. To confirm your identification, crush a leaf and sniff it. It stinks, rather like pine tar soap, especially on warm, sunny days. Skunkvine's scientific name, *Paederia foetida*, is right on the nose.



Photo by Chris Evans, University of Illinois, Bugwood.org

To confirm your identification, look for a twining vine without tendrils. Its leaves grow in pairs, opposite one another. The leaves are lance- or heart-shaped, sometimes pleated and sometimes smooth. Its stems get woody as they get bigger. Blooming in summer and fall, its delicate little tubular flowers typically are cream-colored with maroon interiors. Their round fruits are about a 1/3-inch in diameter.

Skunkvine is not fussy about its habitat. It can grow in sandhills and swamps, pristine places, and highly disturbed habitats. Native to Asia, it was brought to Florida in the late 1800s as a potential fiber crop. Skunkvine is listed by the Florida Invasive Species Council as a Category 1 invasive, which means it can damage and even obliterate native plant communities.

What makes it such a big problem is that skunkvine can regrow from any piece of the stem that has a node. It forms a shallow underground network that goes every

which way. Skunkvine produces tons of seeds, which can be wind-blown and possibly spread by birds. It's a perennial plant that may die back in cold weather, but it will come right back in warm weather, year after year.

To eradicate it, remove all of the vine and dig up the root. Stuff all parts of the plant in plastic bags and put the bags **in the trash**—not in your compost pile, not lying in your yard, not along the roadside. Some experts advise applying an appropriate herbicide to the vines and leaving them so the herbicide can be transported to the roots, thereby killing the whole plant.

Most importantly, be vigilant. Keep watching for it. Keep digging up its roots as best you can. At least, you'll be saving your shrubs and trees from death by skunkvine.

For advice about identifying and eradicating skunkvine and other invasive plants, call the University of Florida/Institute of Food and Agricultural Services (UF/IFAS), Leon County, <https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/leon/> or (850 606-5200).



Drawing by IFAS staff, UF/IFAS Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants



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Magnolia Drive Construction

By Edward Reid

What is the Project?

Many Indianhead residents have been following the plans for construction on Magnolia Drive for years. It's been delayed for about five years, so long that it may have dropped below the level of immediate consciousness. But it's time to get ready ... the storm is arriving. Construction will begin soon on the section from Pontiac Drive to Diamond Street.

To recap, the project involves

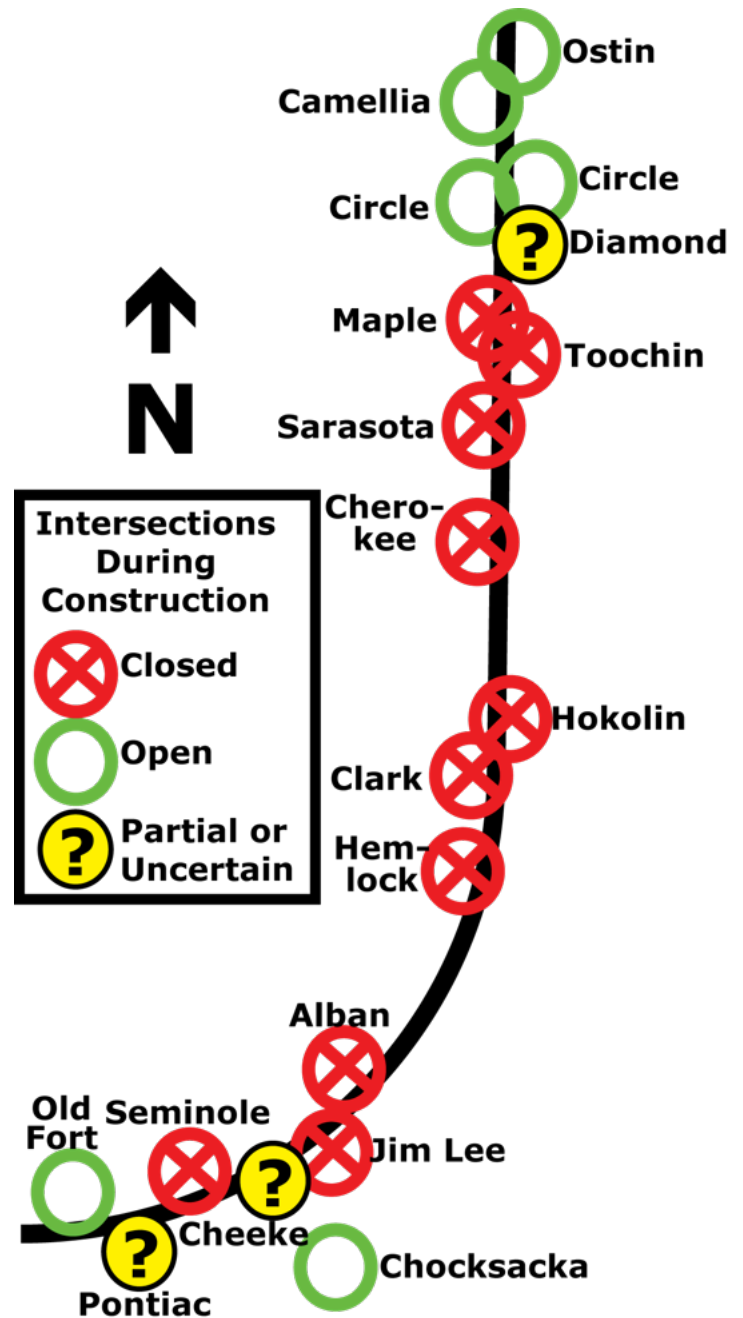
- Roadway reconstruction.
- Moving the electric lines underground.
- Enclosing the stormwater drainage—no more ditches on the east side of the road.
- Adding a wide sidewalk/path on one side, which they call a multi-use trail. This will be on the Indianhead side, except near Jim Lee Road. There is insufficient space to build it on both sides.
- Landscaping the area between the road and the path.
- New traffic light at the intersection of Jim Lee Road and Magnolia Drive.

A lot of the design has been modified based on community input. Undergrounding the electric was strongly advocated, and the funding was approved. This however delayed the overall project, because the work already done (Meridian to Pontiac) had to be modified, since it was not originally reconstructed for underground electric lines.

Also, the initial build between Pontiac and Meridian did not, shall we say, satisfy esthetic criteria. The plans were modified for the remaining sections, which required additional right-of-way expansion. The already-built section of the trail was also improved to come closer to the esthetics of the design for the next sections.

When Will the Construction Start?

The plan is to start in the fourth quarter of 2023, in other words October through December. As of October 10, the request for bids had not been put out. The project



manager told me “we still have time to award the contract and start in the fourth quarter”, but he hesitated. There’s still a chance the construction could start before the end of 2023. Some work is already being done so that utility connections are ready for the disruption.



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What Parts Will Close, & When?

Most likely, Magnolia Drive will be completely closed from Pontiac Drive to Diamond Street for the entire duration. The details, however, are at the option of the contractor, who hasn't been chosen yet.

This means that neighborhood exits at Hocolin Nene and Toochin Nene will be completely blocked. Drivers exiting onto Jim Lee Road will have to go south.

Officially, the posted detour will utilize Blair Stone Road. However, we have to expect increased traffic through the Nenes during the road closure.

How Long Will Construction Take?

The estimate is 15 months. The plan is 15 months. Wanna buy a bridge?

What Comes After?

The final phase of the project is the part from Diamond Street to Apalachee Parkway. This part is complex due to the businesses, streets, and rights-of-way involved. The design is said to be 90% complete, with right-of-way acquisition in progress.

For more information, see <https://tinyurl.com/IHL-magnolia>. Note the Project Snapshot button on that page.



To Live in the Nenes: Simple Lesson of a Biscuit

By Donna Decker

Carefully six feet apart in the early days of COVID, I walked Indianhead with a friend, a Nene yoga teacher. She pointed out a pileated woodpecker perched on a nearby magnolia tree. This was my first view of the big red-headed bird, and it flashed gorgeous white underwings amidst black feathers as it flit from tree to pole.

When we neared the intersection of two shaded roads near Optimist Park, a Rottweiler leaped up and began robustly barking from the other side of a chicken wire fence. Across the yard, his person hollered, “His name is Cooter, and he wants you to feed him a biscuit.”

Now I knew that attached to the mailbox was a plastic jar filled with one-inch squares of, what must have been to Cooter, morsels of deliciousness in his days of roaming the grasses. His comrade Tiger, a medium-sized auburn mutt, more mature, ambled over.

I unscrewed the lid, picked out two thin crackers, held one in each hand. As I poked the biscuits through the wire, Cooter panted, wiggled, snatched his, while patiently, Tiger waited when his fell onto the dirt. He pushed his nose through the fence, struggling to reach it. So I picked it up, offered it on my palm, and he politely licked it into his mouth.

“Best neighbor ever!” their person shouted. So lovely to hear, tears sprang to my eyes.

In that time of worrying about touching shopping carts, doorknobs, and gas pumps, of repeatedly washing our hands like everyday Lady Macbeths, it was a joy to have dog spit on my hands again.

That ritual became a highlight of my days in the unpredictable time pandemic days.

I’m grateful to live in a community where the name of the park is hopeful, greenspace is prevalent, bird sightings are a regular occurrence, and kindness—like a welcome jar of biscuits—is generously practiced.

And I’m happy to say that the container of regularly replenished biscuits at the crossroads lives on.

Trees for Fall Color

Text and photo by Jody Walthall, retired co-founder of Native Nurseries and a volunteer writer, activist, and outdoorsman.

As daytime temperatures begin to cool and open windows at night let in refreshing breezes, you may need a light blanket on the bed. Day lengths are getting shorter as the planet travels around the sun at 67,000 miles per hour toward the winter solstice.

Trees begin preparing for winter by transferring chlorophyll from leaves into stems, showing us other colors present in the leaves. We enjoy this time of year with comfortable temperatures and the colorful change of seasons.

Compared to New England, North Florida fall color is more variable from year to year, but we do have

several trees with dependable fall color. The trees mentioned here are all American natives which, in addition to great fall color, have value to wildlife throughout the year. Take oaks as an example. White oak and swamp chestnut oak leaves typically turn a pleasant shade of red. In spring and summer, caterpillars dine on their new succulent leaves.

In the United States, ninety species of oaks are food for 534 species of caterpillars! Most of these caterpillars become high-quality protein for baby birds and their parents. In autumn, acorns are food for insects, birds, and mammals.

During winter, we think of deciduous oaks or trees in general as devoid of insect life. However, many species of moths, particularly inchworms, overwinter as caterpillars camouflaged as twigs or

hiding in bark crevices. They do absolutely nothing from November through February. Birds such as the ruby-crowned kinglet, golden-crowned kinglet, and blue-gray gnatcatcher survive the winter on these and other insects. Chickadees, which visit feeders all year, must have fifty percent of their winter diet as insects. Most species of native insects can only digest the leaves of native plants; let us look at native trees for our area that have dependable fall color.

Pignut and mockernut hickory, commonly seen growing along our canopy roads, are a beautiful yellow gold in fall. The dangerous looking, though harmless, hickory horned devil caterpillar eats hickory leaves and transforms into a stately regal moth.

Sweetgum, sometimes shunned because of its seed pods, is one of the best. Autumn

leaves may be dark purple, red, or yellow. Luna moth caterpillars eat the leaves, and American goldfinch and Carolina chickadees relish the seeds plucked from the prickly balls.

Red maple is like sweetgum in having a range of color—purple, red, orange, or yellow. The Florida sugar maple is always a fiery orange, while chalk maple is reliably yellow each year. A friend described a row of chalk

maples in his yard as a line of candles glowing in autumn.

Bald cypress, a deciduous conifer, turns a wonderful rusty cinnamon color along our rivers or in your yard. Sassafras is usually red or yellow. It is also a larval food plant for the spicebush swallowtail. Black cherry, sporting red or orange leaves, is host to the caterpillars of cecropia moth, tiger



Brain, Body, Balance

By Wendy Barber

swallowtail, and red-spotted purple, among others.

Two smaller trees with color are the blue beech and greybeard. Blue beech should be planted under taller trees and turns yellow gold. Plant greybeard, always a bright yellow in fall, in sun to light shade.

American beech is unique in that it has stunning yellow-orange leaves in autumn, but the leaves do not fall off for winter. The leaves turn dark rusty-brown or beige and stay on the tree until springtime. Young American beech trees are amazing standing in a deciduous forest in winter. They will be just as striking in your yard. They are long lived, growing to 100 feet.

Keep a natural layer of leaves under the dripline of your trees. Do not rake up and dispose of fallen leaves. Caterpillars high in the canopy, when ready to change into a moth or butterfly, usually fall to the ground, hiding among leaves or in the top inches of soil where they pupate. Lawn grass under a tree canopy usually spells death for these creatures. Do not rake excessively deep layers of leaves or pine straw onto the root system of your trees. Interestingly, some caterpillars of butterflies and moths eat only the dead fallen leaves on the ground.

November through February is the best time to plant trees in our area, with December being ideal. Planting in December lets the roots get a head start growing before the next summer's heat arrives. Plant at the correct depth, with the root flare at the soil surface. Untangle, straighten out, or cut off any circling roots if the tree is pot-bound.

The absolute best way to plant a tree is to plant a seed or buy a small bare root seedling. This will allow the tree to develop a properly shaped root system as compared to a large pot grown plant, though young trees in three-gallon pots are usually fine too. Always check the roots. A healthy root system will support your tree in hurricanes, and circling roots will not kill it ten years into its life. Plant a beautiful, shade-giving, wildlife providing tree this winter!

See more articles written by Jody, and color photos, at www.nativenurseries.com.

Exercise is a subset of physical activity. I like to say that all exercise is physical activity, but not all physical activity is exercise.

Exercise is planned, structured, and repetitive. It is known to reduce the risk of chronic disease. With exercise, the brain will show increased formation of neurons and reduced cognitive decline.

Other benefits from regular exercise:

- Cardiovascular exercise may lower blood pressure and improve heart function.
- Your body's metabolism can increase.
- With strength training (for at least thirty minutes per week), you can build muscle leading to improved body function.
- Your respiratory system benefits with improved breathing and lung ventilation.

Increase your strength, balance, and joint mobility with the Senior Center's fitness classes. Here in your neighborhood is a **Brain, Body, Balance** class that can improve agility, coordination, and flexibility.

One neighbor, who has attended the course for at least ten years, remarks "I'm three-quarters of a century old, and BBB is as critical to my well-being as food and sleep. Moreover, I've established enduring friendships and a healthy rhythm in my life."

Brain, Body, Balance
Tuesday and Thursday
9:00 am - 10:00 am
Optimist Park Community Center
\$3 donation for each class



Participants use balls, weights, and stretch bands. Photo by KC Smith

Into the Darkness

By Gordon L. Magill

Living with Darkness

Here in Indianhead-Lehigh, we live in a neighborhood blessed with abundant darkness at night. Our dense tree cover, our distance from downtown, the unilluminated stream course and greenway, and the relatively few street lamps all make for a fairly dark night.

Do you make it a habit to venture out in the dark in our neighborhood to enjoy the night sounds, glimpse the moon and stars (those we can see), and find some peace and quiet? If you are lucky and tread softly, you may see bats, hear an owl's hoots, see the glimmer of fireflies in summer, a nocturnal moth's flutter, or spot a raccoon or opossum scurrying across the road into the woods. If you walk at night in our neighborhood, you also may notice the glare of LED spotlighting on some homes or find that you can't see as many stars as you'd like due to the light from surrounding buildings suffusing the sky.

What is "Light Pollution"?

The local ambient glow of artificial light from buildings, street lamps, cars, and homes is known as light pollution. Since about 1900, the effect and use of artificial light has increased exponentially. In 1870, the use of artificial light was limited to firelight, oil lamps and candle light, and gas-powered lamps. Since the invention of the electric light bulb in 1880, the world's cities have become ablaze with lights all night long.

Today, 10 percent of the total global energy usage is from artificial lighting. Most of the nocturnal use of light is considered wasted into the sky. Hence, wasted light is called "light pollution." Powerful street lamps, especially new LED lamps, spotlights, airport runway lights, skyscraper lighting, and many other types of very strong lights often are badly directed, or directed straight up into the night sky. This causes light pollution that is equivalent to the daily carbon dioxide emissions of 20 million cars. This light pollution is estimated to increase at least 2 percent globally each year.

Many studies of light pollution have found that humans do not need the quantity and

intensity of modern urban lighting to live normal lives and navigate about safely at night. For thousands of years, until the advent of what is called the "Anthropocene Age" or the last 200 years of industrial and technological change, humans lived successfully without much light at night. But "nyctophobia"—our innate, hard-wired fear of darkness and the night—prompts humans to want to be surrounded by light at all times. After all, for most of our history, we were surrounded by wild predatory animals during the night. Keeping the fire blazing all night at the entrance to the cave had a critical importance!

The sheer volume and intensity of the world's artificial light pollution has many negative outcomes on the natural environment, all animals, and even plants. Ecosystems and the balance between predator and prey are upset if the environment is altered by artificial light at night. The animal's circadian rhythms are confused so that it no longer knows whether it should be hiding from predators or out hunting a natural prey. The camouflage of predators is reduced and the hiding places of prey are revealed by artificial light.

Animal migrations are disrupted or altered by light pollution over cities and continents. Birds that rely on navigation by the stars and moon can be drawn off their course by strong artificial light sources. Sea turtles are distracted from their migratory routes and drawn to shorelines by bright lighting. Their nesting patterns and timing of egg production are disrupted by artificial lights along the world's beaches.

Artificial light has damaging effects on insect pollinators worldwide. Their reproductive, or mating and egg-laying cycles, can begin too early or too late in the spring or summer. Artificial light at night can induce early egg hatching, and also affect metamorphosis—the transformation from larva to pupa to adult in insects such as bees, wasps, moths, and butterflies.

Recent research shows that there is an insect die-off, especially among moth populations, in part due to increased artificial light at night, when many nocturnal moths feed, mate, and lay eggs. These moths feed many important predator species, such as small owls, night hawks, and bats.

The Circadian Rhythm

Humans—like all animal, insect, reptile, and bird species on the planet—are influenced by a biological mechanism known as the “circadian rhythm.” This phenomenon is also hard-wired into our brains, and has been so for well over a billion years since the first living organisms appeared during the Precambrian Period. Our circadian rhythm can be thought of as our own internal food and sleep biological clock. It has been controlled genetically in all living things from the first bacterium to modern humans.

The perception of light and dark, sensed primarily through the eye in humans, animals, and insects, calibrates their circadian rhythm. All organisms, from bacteria to plankton, bees to bats, insects and plants, are genetically driven to respond to sunlight or darkness. For most of humanity’s existence, we responded to the onset of dusk and darkness by going to sleep. Correspondingly, at early light in the morning, we awoke, prompted by our circadian rhythm.

Light exposure from cell phones, computers, TV screens, and other electronic devices impacts our circadian rhythm. The ultraviolet or “blue light” coming intensely from these screens has the effect of severely suppressing our circadian rhythm, causing us to remain much more wakeful, even though we may be tired and want to sleep.

The Role of Melatonin

The hormone melatonin, found in all human and animal brains, is crucial to our quality of life. Melatonin is an essential sleep regulator, regulating sleep and wakefulness. Exposure to any artificial light interrupts dark adaptation and routinely suppresses the secretion of melatonin. Melatonin production is dark dependent. It is suppressed when total darkness is interrupted, delayed, or not present. This is true for humans and all animal species.

Studies have shown that melatonin is important in regulating the production in humans and animals of growth-related hormones such as testosterone and estrogen. Sleep deprivation or lack of adequate sleep can result in low levels of melatonin. Low levels of melatonin can

result in over-production of estrogen and testosterone. It is speculated in the medical field that an early onset of puberty in young humans may be influenced by low levels of melatonin due to lack of sleep. Getting enough sleep is vital to maintaining normal levels of melatonin.

Protect Darkness

As residents of a small urban neighborhood such as Indianhead-Lehigh, we can do our part in protecting our nighttime legacy of darkness, and thus protecting our wildlife from light pollution. One way to start thinking about the value of darkness is to take a walk into the darkness of night. A neighbor told me that “nights are a good time to walk to avoid the heat. You are entertained by owls and crickets too, perhaps the scurry of an unknown creature in the bushes to your right.” Be aware of your circadian rhythm and your body’s production of melatonin at night. A good walk at night can help sleep come easier.

Another way to protect our darkness is to be aware of the amount of artificial light we emit at night from our homes. Turn off all unnecessary lights at night, inside and out. Allow your yard and garden to “rest in darkness.” The nocturnal animals and insects that visit your garden will benefit. Go outside for half an hour, while your eyes adjust to the dark, and enjoy the clarity of stars and planets above.

Avoid the use of electronic devices and “blue light” at night. Let the natural early morning light awaken you, not an alarm, as your circadian rhythm gently operates. Also limit the use of LED lights indoors or LED spotlights outdoors, and put these lights on timers. Let shades cover your windows at night. Low intensity light, such as yellow or “soft daylight” light, is much less harsh and harmful to the dark. Covering brighter outdoor lights with a red Mylar or plastic film blocks ultraviolet light effectively, while allowing your eyes and those of insects and animals to utilize their natural night vision.

Some of our streetlamps are now LED. If you find a street lamp offensively bright at night, contact TalGov Utilities to ask whether a lower-intensity lamp can be installed. The City of Tallahassee has ordinances in place

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(Section 10-427) that regulate the type and intensity of outdoor lighting that can be used on a residential building and commercial buildings. These regulate the use of LED lights, the “overspill” of outdoor lighting onto adjacent residential property, ornamental lighting, and the times that outdoor lighting must be turned off at night. This ordinance section may be accessed via <https://tinyurl.com/IHL-lighting-code>. For additional reading, look at *The Darkness Manifesto: On Light Pollution, Night Ecology, and the Ancient Rhythms that Sustain Life* by Johan Eklöf (New York: Scribner, 2020).

Downsize, Renovate, or...

By Terry and Sharon Kant-Rauch

As we age and life situations change, many of us look around our home and try to figure out what’s next. This process can be overwhelming and daunting.

Many decide to downsize, go into a senior community or an apartment, or move closer to family. As we age, our current home may be too big or new physical issues may turn multi-levels, narrow doorways, or large yards into impediments. Financial concerns also can affect the way we view and make decisions.

Evidence suggests that people would like to stay where they are, but they realize they may need renovations to make their home more accessible—for example, by building ramps, improving access to showers, and widening doorways. Deciding whether to stay or go is complicated, especially if one has lived in the neighborhood for many years and has established relationships. Talking through personal needs and concerns with family members and friends can be helpful.

If you consider renovations, you should get at least two estimates from licensed and insured contractors. Renovations can make a home better fit your needs as you age, but can be pricey. Renovations often improve the value of a home when you decide to sell, or may be good for you but not necessarily good for resale. Buyers often want age-in-place options in homes for themselves or someone who may live there or visit. Regardless of your choice, it’s a good idea to get an updated home inspection to be sure your home is going to age well with you or be easier to sell.

We are lucky to live in a neighborhood with N3—Neighbor to Neighbor in the Nenes. Their mission is to help people stay in their home and to provide various types of support, including helping a resident figure out what is needed and how to get it.

Aging in your current home:

- Assess anticipated needs and get quotes for making your home more functional and accessible.
- Compare the cost(s) of renovations and updates to purchasing a different home that has some of your desired features.

The downsizing option:

- Selling your home to purchase or rent a new one, or moving to a retirement community.
- Tackling necessary updates or long-deferred maintenance might increase the value of your current home. Insurance issues for a new buyer may require your roof, HVAC, electrical, and plumbing to be in good working order.
- Your home will be more appealing with fresh paint and less clutter.
- Landscaping to increase curb appeal also is helpful.

If doing renovations is daunting, consult a realtor who can give you an idea of the value difference of selling a home “as is” or making some renovations.

For most of us, our home represents stability, so the inevitable changes needed as we age are better done while we can physically and mentally tackle them. There’s no time like the present.

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The Grail, a Buff Orpington.



Sparrow, a Wellsummer.



A more detailed photo of the coop.



Moira Rose at an early age.