

2024

WINTER 2023/24 • VOLUME 37, ISSUE 4

# VISIONS

NAI SOUTH CENTRAL REGION



In this issue:

***NAI Member Highlight - Kyle Thoresen***

Page 2

**NDDD**

Page 3

***News from Neil***

Page 4

**South Central Members Receive National Awards**

Page 5

***Interpretation on a Tree***

Page 10

**State Reports**

Pages 11-20



# VISIONS

## Newsletter for NAI SOUTH CENTRAL REGION

Winter 2023/24 • VOLUME 37, ISSUE 4

### IN THIS ISSUE

PG 1

- Table of Contents

PG 2

- NAI Member Highlight  
- Kyle Thoresen

PG 3

- NDDD

PG 4

- News from Neil

PG 5

- South Central  
Members Receive  
Awards

PG 8

- South Central  
Treasurer's Report

PG 10

- Interpretation on a  
Tree

PG 11-20

- State Reports
- Arkansas, Page 12
- Kansas, Page 15
- Louisiana, Page 17
- Missouri, Page 17
- Oklahoma, Page 19
- Texas, Page 19

PG 20

- South Central  
Regional Board - Help  
Wanted



*Title photos from  
Dreamstime.com*

# NAI Member highlight - Kyle Thoresen

by Neil Garrison

It's a darn shame that we don't have the wherewithal to bottle up



Kyle's energy and enthusiasm so that we might convert it into a cash cow for NAI South Central

Region's coffers. He's an inspiration for us all. At the very least, I'll relate to you a few tidbits on his life and career.

The most outstanding aspect about Kyle's contribution to the field of interpretation is the somewhat amusing fact that it is not exactly a direct reflection of his official job description. Kyle is employed as the Park Ranger at Osage Hills State Park (Bartlesville, Oklahoma). The vast majority of Kyle's duties relate to law enforcement, yet Kyle displays the inner determination to carry out interpretation tasks at his work site. I guess that it would be fair to characterize him as a "self-starter."

The space limitations that are inherent in this publication do not permit me to ramble on and on about what all that Kyle has accomplished. Nevertheless, I think that I can make-do by offering up as illustration of what Kyle did when it came to brainstorming a public event for the first day of the calendar year. Oh, sure, he was limited to the project

assignment guidelines to do a "First Day" nature hike, but Kyle displayed some creativity and zest when he proposed that the event be done one minute past midnight. Good gosh! That's all well and good, but can you really expect the general public to don stocking cap and mittens for a guided hike during the frozen temperature that is inescapable at such a bizarre "start time"? Well, I am happy to report that he pulled it off. The event was well-attended. It is a credit to his enthusiasm and wit.

I feel at liberty to relate to you one more example of Kyle's outstanding contributions to the interpretive field. His state park work site had its origin in the dire economic throes of the 1930's. The Civilian Conservation Corps tackled the myriad construction challenges there on that piece of public land. Yet, when Kyle attempted to root out the historical evidence of all the CCC work that had been done, he found the records in the office file cabinets wanting. He ferreted out the historical specifics due to his dogged determination to get some answers to his many questions. Eventually, he formatted all of that information into a highly exciting show-and-tell presentation that he delivered to the general public via the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute's programs that were offered at the public library's meeting room in the nearby municipality. The educational program was well-received by an inquisitive public.

Let me take a pause. I need to tell you some things about Kyle.....what with those adventures that he had as a much younger man. That was back when Kyle was a student at the

University of Idaho. He managed to finagle some contract work in the Pacific Northwest. It was a scientific census of Marbled Murrelet nesting populations. (Interestingly enough, these ocean-going birds fly inland at breeding time and fashion a nest cup for their eggs high up on the uppermost branches of some of those coastal forest giants.) When I quizzed Kyle on the specifics of how one does such a thing, he surprised me with details of how he laid prone on the damp forest floor, draped a piece of clear plastic over his up-turned face (to ward off the incessant rain) as he kept watch skyward in a search for those elusive forest-dwelling birds.

After Kyle's graduation from the Idaho institution of higher learning, he followed that up with the successful completion of his Master of Science degree from an educational facility right here in old Region VI of the NAI -- the Stephen F. Austin State University.

Park Ranger? ...well...yeah.....but Kyle is so much more than what you have come to expect from the typical gun-toting enforcer of park regs. He is an inspiration for us all. I am most fortunate to call him my friend.

[My Master's degree from SFA is in Resource Interpretation. - from Kyle T.]

Park Ranger? ...well...yeah.....but Kyle is so much more than what you have come to expect from the typical gun-toting enforcer of park regs. He is an inspiration for us all. I am most fortunate to call him my friend.

# NDDDD [ Notes from the Deputy Director's Desk ]

by Ken Forman

Did you feel the ground move last month? Did you notice a new breeze blowing in the wind? Did you feel the ether vibrating? Yeah, neither did I. However there have been some changes to our region's leadership that need sharing.

If you haven't visited our region's webpage (<https://nairegion6.wordpress.com/>) in the past couple months, I encourage you to take a look now. It's getting even more revamping, but the one thing I want you to click on is the Board Members tab. We have a few new faces on the board and new members often bring new energy. Catherine Combs is our new treasurer. She reports we're doing quite well on the financial front. That is good news for us all. Heather Runyan is filling in for the Digital Communications Chair until we can find someone to step into that role. You might also notice that I've stepped into the role of Deputy Director. That also means I am stepping down as *Visions* co-editor to take a more active role in the leadership of the region. But don't think I'm leaving the newsletter to flutter in the aethernet, direction- and co-editor-less. None other than that fine, young interpreter Chris Pistole will be stepping up to fill the role with all the exuberance, verve, and panache available to him. Look for his touch on the next (Spring 2024) edition.

There are a couple notable holes, though, in the Board. To keep our region moving forward we need an Elections Chair and an Awards Chair. Either of these positions is rewarding,



and neither are too difficult. However, they are essential. If you have questions about duties associated with these positions, please drop me an email at [ken.forman.nai@gmail.com](mailto:ken.forman.nai@gmail.com).

Your officers are working to iron out some of the wrinkles to keep our region moving forward in 2024. Our current challenge (in addition to filling board positions) is to move forward with plans for

the South Central Region's workshop. With the NAI National Conference near the end of 2023, it was decided to skip next year's SCR workshop and move forward to 2025's. As we develop this plan, the board will keep our members appraised.

For now, let the cooler months provide opportunities for reflection and contemplation. I am proud to be a member of this community and look forward to our bright future.

### **Board Change:**

*Prior to publication Amber Myers stepped down as Director. Ken Forman has stepped into those duties. Details of this change and visions for the future will be addressed in the next newsletter.*

### **Production Note:**

*Sorry for the delay in this publication. Due to the fantastic amount of content, wanting to include the award content from the Little Rock Conference, and the change in production staff, this newsletter was delayed. Please look for a notice around March 1 for the next issue of Visions.*

# NEWS FROM NEIL

by Neil Garrison - Yukon, OK  
South Central Oklahoma Rep



## **Amanda (Markey) posted this:**

I'm just going to tell you this and believe it to be the truth...if you missed this event, you missed out! What an amazing community of campers with the biggest hearts for children. We had over 300 guests in the park helping to bring this event to life and more than a thousand people take part in the 24-hour event we call Hoot & Howl CAMP-R-TREAT!

## **Amanda Markey posted, United Cherokee Alliance**

Osda!  
The United Cherokee Alliance was happy to present the town of Bernice with a \$25,000 check for a park and a raised garden for the community.

## **...from Amy Stephens (via Laura Motley)**

**Amy of the Edmond Museum** was at the OKC Zoo for her friend, Gayla.

Our holiday hippo jubilee was November 9!

We are very excited to welcome back Okie Native Gayla Peevy, the singer of the beloved holiday song *"I Want A Hippopotamus For Christmas."*

November 9, inside Love's Pachyderm there was a special sing-along and meet and greet with Gayla!

Guests enjoyed hot chocolate while supplies lasted. All holiday hippo merchandise was available for purchase! Event activities were free with general Zoo admission!

According to an article in the Oct. 30 edition of THE NEW YORK POST newspaper, Gen Z youngsters are using a "dating relationship appraisal process" called "the bird test." It works this

way: ....the woman in the romantic relationship looks out a window and then asks her dating partner -- "Oh, is that a woodpecker?" ....and....if the guy in the relationship shows no interest whatsoever ... well ... the relationship is destined for the dust bin.

## **...from the 11/1/23 issue of THE NEW YORK TIMES newspaper:**

"Birds in the Americas will no longer be named after people. The American Ornithological Society has committed to replacing all bird names derived from people so as not to honor figures with racist pasts."

"The Scott's oriole, native to the Southwest and Mexico, was named after the U.S. Civil War general Winfield Scott, who oversaw the forced relocation of Indigenous peoples in 1838 that eventually became The Trail of Tears."

## **by Katrina Miller**

"The organization's decision is a response to pressure from birders to redress the recognition of historical figures with racist or colonial pasts. The renaming process will aim for more descriptive names about the birds' habitats or physical features and is part of a broader push in science for more welcoming, inclusive environments."

"More than 100 avian species across the Americas will be given new names."

"Notably, only the common English names of birds will change, since scientific names -- which are traditionally in Latin -- are governed by a rigid, universal set of rules that take into account evolutionary relationships between different species. (Latin designations taken from people's names exist as well.)"

-----

It's only one year old, but the Cherokee Nation's tourism welcome center in Vinita, Oklahoma, just won a national award. At the annual American Indigenous Tourism Conference, this Cherokee Nation facility was selected as "Tribal Destination of the Year." (It was a component of the "Excellence in Tourism Industry Awards" program.)

-----

Here's a sad story ... with a (somewhat) happy ending. Four whooping cranes (the "poster child" for the U.S. Endangered Species Act) were killed (illegally) by hunters in southwestern Oklahoma in November of 2021. Each of the defendants was ordered (by a federal judge) to pay a restitution fee of \$17,000.00 to the International Crane Foundation (Baraboo, Wisconsin). In addition to that, each of the defendants had to relinquish ownership of their shotguns (and their hunting privileges will be denied for the next 5 years -- in all 50 states). An additional fine of \$750.00 was given to each of these four persons.

-----

Bill Nye ("The Science Guy") launched an \$8M fund-raising campaign to build a new, state-of-the-art planetarium at Science Museum Oklahoma (OKC). That was back in 2019. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 virus pandemic sauntered into town and threw a big monkey wrench into everything. Despite the funding challenges, the museum is delighted to report that pledges of \$7M have been received so far. (Included in this whopping total of funds is \$3.5M that

**New from Neil continued Page 5**

# South Central Members Receive Awards at 2023 NAI National Conference - Little Rock, AR

*From NAI Award Program Banquet Script Thursday, November 9, 2023 (Edited to include only South Central Region recipients)*

*PARKER (Parker McMullen Bushman, NAI President)*

Welcome to the 2023 NAI Awards Banquet. We are excited to celebrate our award recipients and the contributions they have made to the field of Interpretation. For those of you who may not know, each year I appoint an Award Chair to lead the Professional Awards Committee through the process of selecting our award recipients. This year I selected Sarena Randall Gill and Marissa Llanes as co-chairs and they put together a dedicated committee of professionals. This year's committee included Brian Forist, Brendan Kane, and Paul Cypher, with Heather Manier as our NAI staff liaison.

*PAUL (Paul Caputo, NAI Executive Director)*

In addition to selecting this year's recipients, the Committee led a revision of the Awards Manual which included the addition of Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, & Accessibility nomination criteria. Moving forward the Committee plans to expand this work. As demonstrated this year and past years, there is a lack of representation

of folks from marginalized identities and, though no Committee can fix that in a short span of time, we can make concerted efforts each year to shine the spotlight on interpreters of all identities engaged in justice-centered work.

*PARKER*

We would like to acknowledge the nominators this year who poured their time and energy into making sure NAI Interpreters at all levels feel recognized and seen. If you nominated someone this year, please stand if you are able. Without your efforts, the Awards Banquet would not be possible. We also want to take the time to recognize all the individuals who were nominated this year: Amanda Evans, Amy Stephens, Cyndi Cogbill, Eileen Davis, Eli Strull, Emily Jacobs, Hannah Lansverk-Sonnenberg, Jacqui Ver Loren van Themaat, Jeanne Spencer, Jennifer Tarlton, Kyle Bernis, Leslie James Quinn, Michael Peach, Patrick Wolff, and Peter Stobie. Thank you for making our field what it is!

*PARKER*

We begin with the **Excellence in Interpretive Support Award**. This award is less well known but critical in

providing interpretive support. The award is presented to an entity whose major focus may or may

not be interpretation but has shown recognition of the value of interpretation through exceptional and sustained support. This year we honor the Park Board of Trustees of the City of Galveston.



The Park Board of Trustees of the City of Galveston is responsible for overseeing Galveston Texas' tourism efforts, Galveston Island Beach and Coastal Zone Management. The organization's responsibilities also

**Awards continued Page 6**

## News from Neil Continued (from page 4)

the Love's Travel Stops corporation donated in 2022 ... and ... an additional donation of \$1.5M from the Chickasaw Nation in the latter part of 2023.). Construction on the new planetarium is slated to be complete in the autumn season of 2024.

READER'S DIGEST  
LAUGHTER IS THE BEST

MEDICINE  
THE FUNNIEST JOKES, STORIES,  
AND CARTOONS FROM 100  
YEARS OF READER'S DIGEST

"What is that sound?" a woman visiting our nature center asked.

"It's the frogs trilling for a mate,"

Patti, the naturalist, explained. "We have a pair in the science room. But since they've been together for so long, they no longer sing to each other."

The woman nodded sympathetically. "The trill is gone."

Kathyjo Townson

# South Central Members Receive Awards

(from page 5)

include managing and maintaining approximately 32 miles of beachfront, overseeing three beach parks complete with public amenities, a nature park and preserve, as well as a land-based park boasting public recreation facilities. We celebrate their Women in Coastal Science Program Series, which is hosted at one of their coastal parks, free to the public and designed as a relaxed interview-style session between the scientist and moderator and encourages diverse audience participation. Elizabeth Schneider Walla will be accepting the award on behalf of the Park Board. Elizabeth serves as the Environmental Coordinator and interfaces with internal and external stakeholders and community groups and handles the administration of awards and environmental designations.

**Please join me in congratulating the Park Board of Trustees of the City of Galveston.**

PAUL

The **Outstanding New Interpreter** is presented to an NAI member who, at the time of nomination, has worked less than five years in the profession,



**Josie Gunter, 2023 Outstanding New Interpreter**

full- or part-time, and who demonstrates a recognized potential in interpretation, assumption of leadership roles, creativity in programming or facility development, and a commit-



**Heather Runyan, 2023 Distinguished Front-line Interpreter**

ment to the profession and NAI. Stationed for over three years as a park interpreter at Lake Corpus Christi State Park in Mathis, Texas, **Josie Gunter** researches, develops, presents, and evaluates many of the park's year-round programs, field trips, and outreach events.

Josie creates a welcoming presence at her site and collaborates on communication projects highlighting Black and Latino Days of Observance. Josie currently serves on the board of trustees for the Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust, which receives or purchases land to donate to the National Park System. She is currently working on a Master of Science in resource communication from Stephen F. Austin State University. Most recently, Josie has been accepted into Texas Parks and Wildlife's Master Interpreter training program. **Congratulations, Josie, for being NAI's 2023 Outstanding New Interpreter!**

PARKER

The next category is for the Distinguished Front-line Interpreter Award, which is presented to an NAI member who has worked for five or more years in the profession and whose current duties are at least 60 percent front-line interpretation. We have two recipients for this award.

**Distinguished Front-line Interpreter Award recipient is Heather Runyan.**

Heather didn't always know they wanted to work in interpretation, but once they stumbled across it they never looked back. They served two terms as an AmeriCorps member at a botanical garden before becoming a park interpreter in Arkansas in 2006. They have worked at multiple parks with a focus on environmental education and outdoor recreation. For them, the best part of the job is getting to share a passion for Arkansas' natural resources with guests and watch as they discover something new.

Heather has served as the Scholarship and Professional Development Chair for the South-Central Region and the Interpretive Naturalist Section and is currently serving on the Scholarship and Professional Development Committee for the Interpretive Naturalist Section. They have also served as a board member on the NAI National Board of Directors and presented at multiple NAI Community and National Conferences.

**Please join me in congratulating Heather Runyan.**

PAUL

**Distinguished Interpretive Manager Award recipient is Rusty Scarborough.**

After ten years as the Education Program Coordinator for the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, Rusty moved back home to Louisiana and is now the Park Manager for Caddo Parish Parks & Recreation's Walter B. Jacobs Memorial Nature Park in Shreveport, Louisiana. In addition to managing the park, Rusty continues his close work caring for and training the park's bird of prey collection,

**Awards continued Page 7**

# South Central Members Receive Awards (from page 6)

which includes a bald eagle, owls, hawks, and falcons. Over the past



**Rusty Scarborough, 2023 Distinguished Interpretive Manager**

30 years, Rusty achieved the level of master falconer and currently serves as President of the Arkansas Hawking Association. Rusty holds certifications with the National Association for Interpretation as Certified Interpretive Guide and Certified Interpretive Trainer and is a founding board member and current President of the Louisiana Master Naturalist-Northwest Chapter.

Rusty has worked hard to further Justice, Equity, Diversity, Accessibility, and Inclusion. Currently, Rusty is overseeing the renovation of his site with focus on features for folks with disabilities. Additionally, Rusty supports his staff with programs

developed for seniors and folks with disabilities. **Congratulations to Rusty for this recognition of the 2023 NAI Distinguished Interpretive Manager Award!**

PAUL

The **Fellow Award** is NAI's highest honor for an individual member who exemplifies career achievement in guiding the interpretive profession through training, mentoring, writing, front-line interpretation, management, and JEDAI values. **This year's Fellow Award will be going to Jay Miller.** Jay Miller worked with Arkansas State Parks for 37 years, first as a state park planner and state trails coordinator, then as head of the Program Services division. He was responsible for programs, publications, and exhibits, and oversaw hiring and training of interpreters, and provided direction for interpretation within Arkansas's 52 state parks, historic sites, and museums. In 2022, Jay retired a second time, from Arkansas Tech University where he taught three courses

in interpretation. Today Jay owns Interpretive Communications and is a consultant to agencies and private entities specializing in theme-based interpretation and interpretation planning.

Jay is a longtime believer in the value of diversity, equity, and inclusion. He includes a section on removing barriers in all his CIG and park planning workshops. He has been a consultant to the Madagascar National Park Service and developed an interpretation training program for Malagasy National Park staff. In Bolivia he devel-



**Jay Miller (L), 2023 NAI Fellow**

oped the interpretation plan for the Flor de Oro ecolodge complex at Noel Kempff Mercado National Park. Recently, Jay served as NAI's Board President where he worked with the board to create procedures to report discrimination and designate one member-at-large board position for an individual from a historically marginalized identity.

## Pictures from the South Central Region Meet at National Conference in Little Rock



# For the Love of Spreadsheets

## Report from S.C. Treasurer Catherine Combs

When I was 13, my mother, an accountant, took me by the shoulders and looked me in the eye and said, "Whatever you do in life, do it with love, but for the love of money, don't become an accountant."

Zoom forward in time ten years, and

here I am accepting 2 boxes of financial records, a cash bag, and a card reader from the prior South Central treasurer, Kayla Gomance. (Not to mention a Google Drive full of beautiful spreadsheets). I suppose NAI South Central treasurer is as close as I can get to accounting without breaking the mother's back. I look

forward to serving you as treasurer and providing upfront breakdowns of financial comings and goings to the best of my ability. And I solemnly swear to keep the spreadsheet nerd outs to a minimum.

Speaking of love for spreadsheets...

	JULY-SEPT 2023	OCT-DEC 2023	JAN-MAR 2024	APR-JUNE 2024	Fiscal Year 2024
<b>REVENUE</b>					
4100 Workshop Revenue	\$ 0.00	\$ 0.00	\$ 0.00	\$ 0.00	\$ 0.00
4200 Member Networking Revenue	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
4300 Fundraising Revenue	2000.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2000.00
4400 Miscellaneous Revenue	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
<b>EXPENSES</b>					
5100 Workshop Expenses	700.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	700.00
5200 Member Networking Expenses	(156.75)	0.00	0.00	0.00	(156.75)
5300 Administrative Expenses	(52.25)	0.00	0.00	0.00	(52.25)
5400 Fundraising Scholarship Expenses	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
5500 Miscellaneous Expenses	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
<b>NET PROFIT/LOSS</b>	\$ 2,491.00	\$ 0.00	\$ 0.00	\$ 0.00	\$ 2,491.00
<b>ENDING ACCOUNT BALANCE</b>	\$ 43,996.91	\$ 0.00	\$ 0.00	\$ 0.00	

Above is a breakdown of the most recent financial record from NAI. Financial reports are updated quarterly. The most recent report for Oct-Dec 2023 will come out in January and so the account balance below is estimated based on known revenues/expenses.

For the Oct-Dec FY24 quarter, we had the following:  
 - 4300 Fundraising Revenue: \$2000 anonymous donation for NAI National Workshop Scholarships.  
 - 5200 Member Networking Expenses: ~(\$147) (based on FY23 Oct-Dec

expenses)  
 - 5400 Fundraising/Scholarship Expenses: (\$3,550.00) to send four individuals to the NAI National Workshop.

These individuals submitted scholarship applications and an essay answering the question: "Which of Tilden's Principles do you regard as being the most important?" We have some very wise members in our region!

Based on these revenues/expenses, we are more likely sitting around

\$42,000.

In other words, yes, we have money. And quite a lot of it.

One more spreadsheet and then I'm done, I promise.

**Treasurer Report continued  
Page 9**

# For the Love of Spreadsheets

(from Page 8)

	2016	2017	2018	2019	FY2020	FY2021	FY2022	FY2023	FY24 YTD to 9/30/23
<b>BEGINNING BALANCE</b>	\$27,815.32	\$36,857.74	\$38,589.09	\$37,594.10	\$31,583.36	\$39,279.22	\$38,279.22	\$40,015.37	\$41,505.91
<b>REVENUES</b>									
4100.06 Workshop Registrations	\$74,824.03	Year Missing	\$33,002.00	\$24,294.00	\$26,055.00	\$4,098.00	\$2,570.00	\$18,081.00	
4200.06 Member Networking Revenue	5,715.00								
4300.06 Fundraising Revenue			4,538.71	5,247.49	3,468.83	1,622.00	150.00	4,074.02	2,000.00
4400.06 Misc. Income	3,942.55		75.00					500.00	
<b>EXPENSES</b>									
5100.06 Training/ Workshop Expenses	\$(67,934.03)		\$(32,419.48)	\$(22,591.56)	\$(16,856.93)	\$(6,072.69)	\$(177.99)	\$(14,996.73)	\$700.00
5200.06 Member Networking	(2,216.74)			(87.50)	(87.50)		(214.60)	(531.66)	(156.75)
5300.06 Administrative Expenses	(1,634.56)		(243.16)	(8.00)	(36.39)		(591.26)	(64.60)	(52.25)
5400.06 Fundraising/ Scholarship Expenses	(13,504.03)		(5,404.36)	(5,889.47)	(4,730.96)	(754.50)		(5,571.49)	
5500.06 Misc. Expenses	(1,445.42)		(543.70)	(3,000.00)					
<b>ENDING BALANCE</b>	\$36,857.74		\$37,594.10	\$35,559.06	\$39,395.41	\$38,279.22	\$40,015.37	\$41,505.91	\$43,996.91
					^^ Changed from YTD Jan-Dec to Fiscal year (July-June)				

# Interpretation on a Tree

by Jerrel Geisler, Texas

Sorry, not an Oak tree, not a Pecan, or any other natural tree for that matter. But a simple Christmas Tree. I have written articles for this newsletter regarding odd places that I seem to find, or at least think I find interpretation. But in a Christmas Tree?

If you look at various peoples' family Christmas trees you might find ornaments or decorations which reflect their family's journey through life – ornaments made by their children, pictures, or ornaments from traveling, places they have been. This could be an interpretation of their family's life through the ages. Other people have ornaments of their interests. Cars, tools, food items (my friends have these), or many other accoutrements of things they fancy. [Why do you think Hallmark has such an exten-



sive collection, from cartoons and superheroes, movies and tv, planes, trains, and automobiles.] Like a lot of houses (well maybe not a lot) we have a couple trees up during the holidays. One is our everything tree – the one that has some of the things I previously mentioned. The next is my "Star Trek" tree. Think of Hallmark again, and I have most of all the Star Trek spaceships they created through the years, and maybe a couple Star Wars ones. (Okay, yes, I'm mixing universes – so sue me.) Well, the third one, this year, became

an interpretative tree for me – at least I think so. Back in the mid-1990's my mother began collecting ornaments from the Texas State Capitol. Maybe some of you collect the same or have similar ones in your organization's gift shop. Small brass ornaments with stamped letters, symbols, or images representing the location. Some are just shiny brass while others are ornately colored and detailed. Well, the latter is my Texas State Capitol Ornament Collection.

These ornaments are not just ornaments but symbols of the Texas State House. (Yes, we Texans can be prideful of our state sometimes – maybe not so much lately – but I don't wish to talk politics.)

These ornaments have been a collector's item in my family since 1996 or at least since my mom started giving me my own set as gifts, and yes, I have all through 2023. When she passed away in 2013, I filled in the rest of my collection with ones she had and continue to keep collecting. We traveled for Christmas in 2023, so only this tree and a small "everything tree" made it out as decorations. My "Texas Tree" is now a black iron ornament tree especially made for displaying ornaments.

As I was putting it together this year, I took a good look at the ornaments and the boxes they came in. Each item came in a felt lined box with a small pamphlet explaining what the ornament represents, who the artist



is, and some history of the Texas Capitol or surrounding area. As I was putting the tree up and later taking it down, I took a closer look at the ornaments and their pamphlets. The first of the set represented symbols of Texas, the State seal, the flag, and the dome of the Capitol. Each writing tells of the history of the emblems

and the building. Later ornaments were representative of the door hinges, doorknobs, perimeter fence finials, lighting chandeliers, famous paintings, and even the statue at the top of the dome. Lately the items have been representations of wagons, trains, and trollies. These are examples of vehicles which moved people on and around the capitol grounds in the past and throughout the City of Austin. From these 28 or so ornaments and their accompanying literature, you can get a feel for the Capitol building, its history, the history of Texas, and the Austin area, without ever going to Austin, or into the building.

But that's no fun. When you examine these ornaments and then take a trip to the Capitol, you understand that. "This IS what the door hinges look like", "what the perimeter fence gates look like," and what the history of the Capitol truly is.

Funny how a simple iron tree, a couple dozen brass ornaments, and a simple writeup about each one, can interpret some of the history of Texas and its Capitol Building. It is surprising where you can discover interpretation.



## State reports

Arkansas - Chris Pistole

Kansas - Lindsay Evans

Louisiana - Rusty Scarborough

Missouri - John Miller

Oklahoma - Neil Garrison

Texas - Lisa Cole



**Kayla Gomance, Asst. Chief of Interpretation, Arkansas State Parks:**

On November 28th a ceremony was held at Pinnacle Mountain State Park to dedicate a new Visitor Information Center. The ceremony included remarks from Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders, First Gentleman Bryan Sanders, Secretary of Arkansas Dept. of Parks, Heritage & Tourism Shea Lewis, Office of Outdoor Recreation Katherine Andrews, and Superintendent Josh Jeffers. The project was paid for using revenue collected under Amendment 75, the existing one-eighth percent sales tax devoted to conservation in the state of Arkansas.

Sam Files, Park Interpreter at Pinnacle Mountain, also shared that they had nearly 500 people at the grand opening. Notable former parks people in attendance included: Stan Graves, Mac Balkman, Greg Buttes, Jay Miller, Grady Spann, and Steve Wilson. Local company Loblolly Creamery will be the concessionaire, running the Loblolly Outpost.

During the ceremony they publicly announced the “Maumelle Pinnacles Recreation Master Plan” <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/ff2df6cb71fd4e26af92c83a0a9558f1>.



(Photos by Will Newton and Kirk Jordan of ADPHT)

**Jay S. Miller, CEO Interpretive Communications, Retired Chief of Interpretation, Arkansas State Parks:**

Jay Miller, NAI past President and 2023 Fellow, thanks the humble and hospitable Region 6 folks for their support while he served as NAI President. Several region members served on committees, others spoke with me about areas of concern or interest, still others of you voted for me. Goals of mine included strengthening our communities like Region 6, pushing for more Conference programs which expanded understanding and interest in sites of conscience and controversy, interpreting untold and difficult stories from new perspectives, and maintaining a steady direction for the association. I think we moved forward in all these areas, and much of that was evident at the excellent national conference in Little Rock.

In addition, we faced COVID-19, shutdowns, and more, and came out in a financially sound position.

Congratulations to Jay Schneider and all the leaders and committees that made the Little Rock National Conference a great success. I had many people say they loved Little Rock, it was fun, there was so much going on including so many interpretive sites, and the conference program was excellent. Many of my CIG graduates were able to attend and it was a really wonderful introduction to the larger world of NAI for them.

While a lot has crashed around me this year (I’ll never again say, ‘What else can happen!’), Region 6 and NAI have stood firm. Thank you to all my friends in Region Six. Have a wonderful new year!

The cost of CIG training increases July 1. To avoid the rate hike, join me in

**AR Report continued Page 7**

# ARKANSAS REPORT

sunny, warm Pensacola, January 23-26 for a fine workshop in a beautiful historic site.

If warm and sunny doesn't get your attention, how about upstate New York in February? I'll be teaching the CIG workshop at the St. Lawrence Seaway, Dwight D. Eisenhower Lock and Dam complex in Massena, New York, February 26-29.

## **Morgan Weithman (She/Her), Public Programs Assistant, Historic Arkansas Museum:**

Wanting to share what we've been doing here at Historic Arkansas Museum in Downtown Little Rock. We (very excitedly) just finished an entire 11 months of weekly living history programs.

As a part of our Living Craft initiative, we here at HAM have been organizing what we call Living Craft Saturdays. These take place every single Saturday and offer our guests the opportunity to have some hands-on fun as we explore a variety of skills preservation programs. As a part of that Living Craft Initiative, we have been generously given access to a fund that is specifically used to promote the preservation and continuation of historic skills. Blacksmithing, weaving, historical cooking, and printing/type setting have been the main skills our site has been working on. While doing programming every Saturday this last year, we were able to explore a wide variety of skills, supported by our staff, volunteers, and skilled historical contractors. These skills included meat preservation (salting and smoking), wood carpentry, furniture caning, and cobbling/shoe making. This year has allowed our staff to grow into these new skills.

Each quarter we focused on a different theme, to keep us somewhat corralled into similar topics. Those quarters were then broken down into monthly themes that gave us the opportunity to dive deep into research and have a variety of programs for our guests. We're excited to continue into 2024, however we have re-evaluated our every Saturday schedule and have decided to pull back, to limit burn out with our staff. For those interested in the Living History programming going on here at Historic Arkansas, we will be doing it every third Saturday of the month. On January 20th we'll be "Turning up the Heat" with programming, so come explore the grounds with us as you discover the ways 19th century Arkansans got warm and stayed warm.

A bonus skills workshop will be held once a month: Dye Workshop on January 27th, Basic Blacksmithing on February 10th, Basic Chair Caning on March 30th.

Our first special event of the new year will take place January 13th as we commemorate the bicentennial of the first Arkansas Gazette published where our reconstructed Woodruff Print Shop stands today. Come see everything that went into creating a newspaper in 1824 including how type is set, the press is operated, and prints are dried.

See if you have what it took to be a printing apprentice to Mr. Woodruff!

Shawn Hunter, Northwest Arkansas Master Naturalists, champion for The Diana Project: Saving AR State Butterfly: Check out our growing citizen science project The Diana Project. We collect sightings of and educate the public about our threatened state butterfly, Diana Fritillary. Our recent interview on Ozarks at Large interview with Jack Travis November 22, 2023, tells more about it.

<https://www.kuaf.com/show/ozarks-at-large/2023-11-30/a-passion-for-pollinators-how-the-diana-project-aims-to-save-the-state-butterfly>

Save the Date June 17-23 for The Diana Count on iNaturalist where we will be collecting sightings photos and adding them to The Diana Project on iNaturalist.

We would love to know if you have any opportunities anywhere in Arkansas to share our introduction to iNaturalist class or The Diana Lifecycle Challenges :45-minute slideshow presentation. Our contact information, social median links

**Report continued  
Page 10**

# ARKANSAS REPORT

and 3-year plan can be found at [www.thedianaproject.org](http://www.thedianaproject.org).

## **Lauren Marshall, Educator, Central Arkansas Nature Center, Arkansas Game & Fish Commission:**

October and November were great NAI themed months. Jay Miller came to our site to certify 4 new CIGs in our area. November saw lots of visitation during the Little Rock conference. It was good to see friends from the region and the nation. Ray Navotny may or may not have visited every day and Neil Garrison was inspired by a mussel button display (part of a larger fisheries display) to ask questions about mussel harvest and later production in the Neosho area.

December saw the nature center's 15th Anniversary. In addition to our regularly scheduled range day program some fantastic volunteers did Dutch Oven cooking and gave samples to visitors.

The Nature Center is looking forward to hunting season programs including a statewide "Big Squirrel Challenge". We are also excited about fishing programs like trout fishing and fly tying.

Spring Break will be here before you know it, so we are also living in our spring calendars as well as our present calendars.

## **Sarah Reap, Park Interpreter at Crater of Diamonds State Park:**

Sarah shared this link to the Arkansas State Park website and an article she wrote about an artifact they have there, a grease table, which was used to sort diamonds: <https://www.arkansasstateparks.com/articles/artifact-highlight-grease-table>.

## **Chris Pistole, Park Interpreter, Hobbs State Park-Conservation Area:**

We just finished our school programs for the fall and it was a very busy season. It was dominated by our Outdoor Survival Skills program, which began in 2019 when a 4th grade at one of our partnership schools was reading the book Hatchet and the teachers wanted to tie that to an outdoor learning experience at the park. Later, a Bentonville 6th grade tied it to their reading of Touching Spirit Bear. And the word continued to spread until this fall when we added every 6th grader from Fayetteville schools (about 1,000 total) who visited us! In all, we saw around 1,400 students just for this program who learned how to build a fire and a temporary shelter, as well as how to get safe drinking water and to identify wild edibles. They even had the option of taking our "eat a bug challenge" and try a Larvet (dried mealworm)! The students and teachers loved the whole experience, and we hope many of them return with their families. Even though Fayetteville is only about an hour away, most had never been to Hobbs.

# KANSAS REPORT

My first National Conference with NAI! Wow. I am so grateful to attend the National Conference that also existed in our Region, because as we know, our region is the best region! I was able to attend because of our regional scholarship that was granted, let me encourage you -- apply for these scholarships! The favorite thing I experienced at this conference was getting the enrichment from all my friends and familiar faces in all their capacities. You all truly light me up and I constantly look forward to seeing you, PLUS meeting more of you!

Something that was really enlightening for me were the resources to become more inclusive and how to serve underserved communities. This is something that I need to learn so much more about but thought this conference was just such an incredibly safe space to ask questions, dig deeper, and truly make the change we want to see. Little Rock itself did not disappoint, the food, the nature, the history. Below is a keyhole view of the beautiful, the deep, and the meaningful moments of this conference.

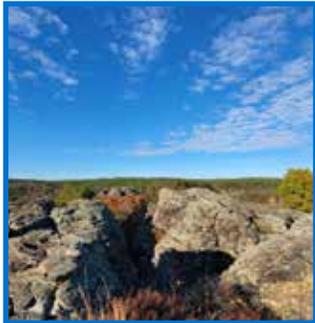
I challenge you to:

1. Attend all conferences you can
2. Sit with someone you don't know at each opportunity you can, and,
3. Say yes to all the adventures!

Miss some hours of sleep to bird watch first thing in the morning, join a 5k even walking, stay up late socializing with new and old friends, join the story circle, experience new! The moments of the conferences that provide the largest impacts are found in these unsure and scared yeses.

Thanks for another great time!

**-Lindsay Evans**



Photos by Lindsay Evans  
 (Captions clockwise from top left)  
 Diana Bliss and Lindsay Evans exploring Petit Jean S.P.; Gus, if you know you know; Petit Jean State Park; Little Rock Central High School; The Little Rock, lol

**KS Report continued  
 Page 16**

# KANSAS REPORT

**Emily Davis | Director of Educational Programs  
Great Plains Nature Center, Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks:**

The Great Plains Nature Center will have a new Lead Naturalist starting in January and would like to welcome Emma Tingle to the team! This vacancy came after Katlin Dunsing joined the Milford Nature Center as their new Assistant Director. Congrats to Katlin! Field trip season for the GPNC closed out successfully. One highlight was after a Plant Teamwork field trip, which focuses on how plants use teammates like animals, the wind, and water, to disperse their seeds and pollinate. At the end of the field trip when a 1st grader was asked what they learned today, one student raised her hand and enthusiastically yelled “Plants are important!!”. We are now preparing for our annual Kansas Day Celebration and launch of our 2024 Annual Program Guide on January 27th.

Members of Kansas Audubon, Great Plains Nature Center, Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, USFWS, and more have been participating in Christmas Bird Counts for the past week in various locations including the Great Plains Nature Center in Chisholm Creek Park, Quivira National Wildlife Refuge, and Cheyenne Bottoms.

**Alisa Grunewald, Park Naturalist  
Johnson County Park & Recreation District, Ernie Miller Park Nature Center:**

Road Trip! The excitement was hard to contain as we embarked on our first ever NAI National Conference. I am a Park Naturalist at Ernie Miller Nature Center who was traveling from Olathe and had no idea what to expect. Upon arrival, there were smiling faces everywhere with like-minded people in every conference room. Making sure to take advantage of every opportunity, my schedule was full. So many of the classes taken were life changing. Collaboration is “For the Birds” really opened my eyes to the declining number of songbirds and how we can help.

“Developing the Leader in You” gave me some insight into professional development along and a few tools to help with personal growth. There was one class that stood out and really changed my life and that was “Forest Bathing: Build Community Connectivity”. The teacher and all her resource recommendations like books, podcasts, websites, tea, and articles provided more clarity and further teaching after returning to Olathe. This conference did not disappoint, and I would without a doubt go again. Thank you so much for the opportunity!!!

**M.C. Rose, MBA, Park Naturalist I  
Ernie Miller Park and Nature Center**

Attending the 2023 National Association of Interpreters conference in Little Rock proved to be an unforgettable experience. The conference sessions were nothing short of enlightening, with a particular highlight being the Indigenous Voices discussion that resonated deeply, shedding light on the importance of diverse perspectives in interpretation. The innovative concept of forest bathing, introduced in one of the sessions, turned out to be a transformative experience, blending nature immersion and mindfulness. For me, the therapeutic effects of this practice lingered long after the conference. The session on incorporating Indigenous voices was a thought-provoking and enlightening experience. It provided a valuable opportunity to explore the significance of amplifying Indigenous perspectives in various fields and highlighted the importance of cultural diversity and inclusion. From nature journaling to tackling difficult topics, and as a first-time attendee, the experience was nothing short of transformative. Plus, as a geology nerd, I loved the excursion to Hot Springs National Park.

**From Director of Nature Reach, Delia Lister,:**



We welcome aboard new hire at the PSU Nature Reach department. This department uses live animals to provide programming on campus, in schools, and parks. It has grown tremendously!

Sisson, 29, graduated last December with a degree in Biology and an emphasis in Wildlife Ecology and Conservation. Welcome Sisson!

She aims to improve environmental literacy in student’s pre-K through Grade 12. “I’m passionate about educating children about nature, to make sure to help them appreciate and respect wildlife but not be scared of it,” she said. “I want them to

know the difference between facts and myths, and to understand why conservation is important.” -Sisson



# NO REPORTS AVAILABLE

for Louisiana

Catch you in the next Edition

Send any State updates to your state representative or the *Visions* editors by the deadline posted on the publication information page.



*“Winter Wings: Capturing the Beauty of Birds Through the lens.”*

By Mike Hensley

Winter is one of my favorite times to photograph wildlife, especially birds. While it can be difficult for you to find those birds, once you find them, they can tell an interesting story. Winter wildlife gives us an opportunity to see wildlife in a more vulnerable state. Struggling to survive the harsh winter that the great Lake Erie dishes out on the North Coast where I am located.

Nestled almost equal distances from Cleveland and Toledo, the Sandusky Bay area is an exceptional birding spot for those who are willing to brave the cold and wind around Lake Erie during the winter months. With various stops on the Lake Erie birding trail, we are rarely short on birds or birding habitat.

Through photography, I have been fortunate to share some remarkable moments with wildlife. Every time a photograph a new species I feel a great sense of accomplishment, as if I had just completed a marathon. My favorite thing about wildlife photography is that I get to tell a story or better yet a triumph of how I was able to capture a species but only for a moment.

Photography has given me an additional tool in my interpreter’s tool belt that I didn’t even realize, I had until recently. These photographs share stories and memories that I will carry with me for the rest of my life and career as an interpreter.

**MO Report continued  
Page 10**

# MISSOURI REPORT



Dark-eyed Junco, *Junco hyemalis*

Location: Community Foundation Preserve at Eagle Point



American Tree Sparrow, *Spizelloides arborea*

Location: Community Foundation Preserve at Eagle Point

On a blistery winter afternoon this American tree sparrow decided to part from its fellow tree sparrows and investigate my “pish” call to grab its attention.



Immature American Bald Eagles, *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*

Two immature Bald Eagles quarreling for the best hunting perch. This photo was taken from Wyandot MetroPark looking out over Sheldon’s Marsh State Nature Preserve in Huron, Ohio.



White-winged Scoter, *Melanitta deglandi*. (female)

Location: Putnam Marsh

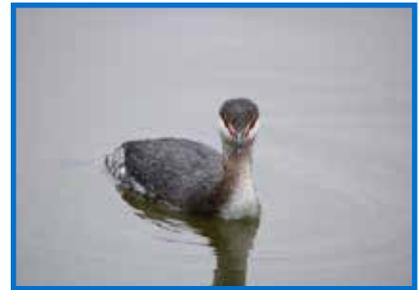
Amidst the icy expanse, the White-winged scoter glided gracefully, its ebony plumage contrasting with the frozen landscape. As I slid across the ice of the Sandusky Bay to capture this photo a small though crossed my mind that had not arisen until I raised the camera. If the ice breaks, who will know I’m here?



Lapland Longspur, *Calcarius lapponicus*

A large flock of Lapland Longspur on at the Huron Pier.

Location: Huron, Ohio



Horned Grebe, *Podiceps auratus*

Location: Putnam Marsh

As this Horned grebe emerged from the tranquil water of Lake Erie, it startled me, but I was just quick enough to snap two photos before it tilted its head and quickly swam under the water back into the mysteries beneath the surface.



Ducks on the Sandusky Bay, Sandusky, Ohio



Fox Sparrow, *Passerella iliaca*

A brave Fox Sparrow that spent the winter under the feeders at the Community Foundation Preserve at Eagle Point.

Location: Sandusky, Ohio



**From Amanda Markey**

I'm just going to tell you this and believe it to be the truth...if you missed this event, you missed out! What an amazing community of campers with the biggest hearts for children. We had over 300 guests in the park helping to bring this event to life and more than a thousand people take part in the 24 hour event we call Hoot & Howl CAMP-R-TREAT!



**Texas State Report**  
**by Lisa Cole**  
**December 2023**

“Winter” greetings from San Antonio, where it is 45 degrees and raining one day, and a balmy, sunny 72 degrees the next day. Keeps me on my toes!

Speaking of San Antonio, **Stella Renee Luna of the San Antonio River Authority** told me that they recently hosted a CIG training in October 2023 and will be hosting another in April 2024. Here is the link:



Photo from Dallas Zoo

[https://www.interpnet.com/NAI/nai/\\_prof\\_development/reg/cigregistration.aspx?EventKey=GI043024](https://www.interpnet.com/NAI/nai/_prof_development/reg/cigregistration.aspx?EventKey=GI043024)

According to Stella Renee, “We are so excited that we have been consistently hosting CIG and CIH training for over 10 years. We also offer a scholarship spot in each class for a student, volunteer or other qualified individual wanting to enhance their public service by attaining CIG or CIH status.”

News from Conservation Interpreter **James Berlin** in Dallas: “Working at the Dallas Zoo introduces new ideas and stories daily, and amid the Holiday Season, we’re witnessing a surge in families visiting. It’s truly remarkable to extend invitations to entire groups, enhancing interactions for our Conservation Interpreter team. This influx has allowed

**TX Report continued**  
**Page 11**

# TEXAS REPORT

us to spotlight turtles and water pollution, presenting biofacts and educational tools on carts for guests to engage with. Standing on the bridge, a focal point over Cedar Creek, where local turtles reside, I had a heartwarming encounter with a child using American Sign Language. Despite the language barrier, her dad facilitated communication, making it a memorable experience of building bridges. Check out the photo from another interaction in the same spot!”



Photo from Randy Bissell

Randy Bissell is a professional geologist who trains Texas Master Naturalists in geology, landscape, and earth history for the South Texas MN Chapter (Corpus Christi). He reports they recently certified 18 new naturalist volunteers for South Texas. As an adjunct faculty member at a local university, he also leads field excursions that involve geology and ecology for college students. Randy reports, “Effective techniques in nature interpretation are a new priority in improving my outdoor education skills. The insights gained from my brief membership in the NAI and the ideas gleaned from the Legacy Magazine are very helpful in developing and improving field training.”

Texas State Parks just certified 15 new CIGs at Lake Brownwood State Park. The class included park interpreters, park operations trainees, and park office staff from across the state.



Texas CIG's



Josie Gunter

A big shout-out goes to Josie Gunter, interpretive ranger at Lake Corpus Christi State Park, who received the Outstanding New Interpreter of the Year Award at the recent National NAI conference in Little Rock. Josie is an amazing part of the Texas State Parks interpretive team and skillfully shares the stories of her park and Texas with thousands of people each year. We're all proud to have her on our team!



According to the NAI South Central Region website, the regional board is in need of help with the following board positions:

**Deputy Director  
Awards Chair &  
Elections Chair**

Please contact Ken Forman for more information if interested

# NAI SOUTH CENTRAL REGION VISIONS NEWSLETTER PUBLICATION INFORMATION



**Visions** Newsletter is the newsletter for South Central Region of the National Association for Interpretation (NAI). The South Central Region includes states of Arkansas, Kansas, Louisiana, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Texas. For Region 6 information go to [www.nairegion6.wordpress.com](http://www.nairegion6.wordpress.com). Board member email: [NAISouthCentral@gmail.com](mailto:NAISouthCentral@gmail.com). The national office for NAI is located in Ft. Collins, Colorado. Their website is [www.interpnet.com](http://www.interpnet.com).

## **Director**

Ken Forman, CIG  
Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, Yellville, AR

## **Publication Editors**

Chris Pistole, CIG  
Hobbs State Park-Conservation Area, Rogers, AR

Jerrel Geisler, CIG  
Harris County Precinct 3 Parks, Houston, TX

## **Officers**

**Deputy Director**  
OPEN

**Secretary**  
Casey Watson, CIG  
Dalhart, TX

**Treasurer**  
Catherine Combs  
Arkansas

**Digital Communications**  
Heather Runyan - Interim  
Magnolia, AR

## **Committee Chairs**

**Scholarship & Professional Development**  
Jeanne Spencer, CIG

**Awards**  
OPEN

**Membership**  
Jeanne Spencer, CIG

**Elections**  
OPEN

## **NAI National Office**

P.O. Box 2246  
Fort Collins, CO 80522  
970-484-8283  
888-900-8283

## **State Coordinators**

**ARKANSAS:** Chris Pistole, CIG, Hobbs State Park-Conservation Area, Rogers, AR

**KANSAS:** Lindsay Evans, Ernie Miller Nature Center, Olathe, KS

**LOUISIANA:** Rusty Scarborough, CIT, Walter Jacobs Memorial Nature Park, Shreveport, LA

**MISSOURI:** John Miller, Reed Spring, MO

**OKLAHOMA:** Neil Garrison, Martin Park Nature Center (Retired), Oklahoma City, OK

**TEXAS:** Lisa Cole, CIG, Government Canyon State Natural Area, TX

To email a board member: [NAISouthCentral@gmail.com](mailto:NAISouthCentral@gmail.com)

## DEADLINES FOR *VISIONS* ARE:

Spring: March 20 • Summer: June 20 • Fall: September 20 • Winter: December 20