

# Footsteps

Fun, Fitness, Friendship

Volume XXIII Number 3

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## The Prez Sez...

Hello NWFT club members,

If you haven't made plans yet to do a little traveling

to the rest of our spring walks, get your rear in gear. We have some great walks even though they are a ways away from home.

Our two walks on May 14 will be special. I can't wait to see the Honeybees in Auburn on Saturday morning. I love scavenger hunts and finding these bees will be a sweet treat. And the starting point is a National Historic Park. The granite and limestone structures were part of the WPA projects and the rock pedestrian bridges were originally designed to accommodate horse and buggy.

On to Humboldt in the afternoon. The town square is full of history with a beautiful park that features an elevated bandstand, the smallest street in the county, a tour of the Quad County Museum and to top it all off, a gorgeous garden to finish off the walk.

Only a week later, you can take a real road trip to Chadron. The folks there have done a great job putting together their first Volksmarch. Spend a couple of days and do the two brand new year rounds and seasonal event. They are all great walks.

Then, we head to Grand Island the first Saturday in June. This is

always a fun walk. We get to revisit some of the sites we saw during the Eclipse events as well as see old friends. This walk is being sponsored by the family of some past walkers, Joyce McNair and Glenda Tucker.

We finish up our spring walking season (actually now summer) with a nonsanctioned walking tour during the grand opening of Gene Leahy Mall at The RiverFront. This is one mile of all new art, play, rest, dogs and exercise. Volunteer or come walk and get the scoop-the history, the construction and the hopes for this new downtown Omaha space.

Stay Safe, Stay Healthy  
and Happy Walking,  
~Steve

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For the latest on events and news visit our website:  
[nebraskatrailblazers.com/](http://nebraskatrailblazers.com/)



or like us on Facebook

## New Club Website Address

Our club's website has changed to <https://www.nebraskatrailblazers.com/> but you can just type in [nebraskatrailblazers.com](http://nebraskatrailblazers.com). This new address is more secure and has some new capabilities that we're still exploring. If you have bookmarked the club website on your phone, tablet or computer, be sure to change the bookmark to [nebraskatrailblazers.com](http://nebraskatrailblazers.com).



## Sandy peaks

### What you might not know about Gene Leahy Mall

Do any of you remember what the area looked like before the Mall?

Workers spent many days grinding meat and loading boxes in a gritty part of downtown Omaha called Lower Douglas. Business got done, even if the setting wasn't so glamorous. The area that included a butcher shop was also a labyrinth of taverns, flophouses, supply stores and assorted trades.

There was an exodus of businesses away from downtown to the suburbs, most visibly represented by the loss of the downtown Brandeis store.

Many of us older folks remember the beginnings of the Gene Leahy Mall. But do you know where the concept actually came from? The mall began as part of an idea from three University of Nebraska-Lincoln architecture students in 1967. Then Mayor Leahy boosted the student idea by appointing a "Return to the River" Committee, which sketched the first version of the mall. A side note about Gene Leahy—while serving as Mayor he also hosted a Sunday morning TV show where he read the Sunday Funnies to children.

Bell bottomed clerical workers sat behind their typewriters and watched as construction crews leveled a swath of downtown Omaha and then scooped out the sunken park that would become Gene Leahy Mall. Six square blocks of vintage buildings, a rail yard and a lead smelter fell to make way for a sunken park that was viewed as salvation for a then-dying downtown. Soon Omaha boosters had a picture-postcard image of grassy slopes, curving pathways and a lagoon that reflected the skyscrapers behind it. It was dedicated in June, 1977, as Central Park Mall and renamed in Gene Leahy's honor in 1992. The park sparked millions of dollars of new investment around its edges. And those developments, in turn, encouraged construction of still more downtown offices, arts facilities, hotels and apartments.

### Why change a good thing?

Although it has been in place for years and did help stimulate development, the Return to the River has failed to recently live up to its potential. The lagoon with its trails was designed to provide a restful setting for people taking a break from nearby office buildings. It had minimal use, especially at night

due to the perception of safety. It did not provide gathering areas. And there were no ongoing events or safety presence.

### What is coming?

By raising Gene Leahy Mall, more eyes and activities will be on the park making it safe for all. The RiverFront will have full-time public safety officers 24/7 to ensure the safety and security of guests. It was designed to provide accessible park space for all guests. And activities are planned throughout the days, weekends and evenings.

If you have driven by lately, you have probably noticed the white arches that will cover the Performance Pavilion. The West Lawn will be open for your lawn chairs or blankets while you enjoy musical performances. East of the Performance Pavilion will be the 11<sup>th</sup> Street Promenade. North of the West Lawn will be the Sculpture Garden. These modern sculptures, with names such as Love Exits and Walking Flower Times the Power of Five, will be surrounded by trees and seating areas. You will be able to sit and ponder the art or just relax in the shade. More gardens will be to the west and The Canopies on the southwest. There you will find shaded seating areas to relax, read a book or savor a picnic lunch. If you have noticed the red arches on the south side, you are seeing the Arches Playground. There is a soft surface base to prevent injuries as children play. Not only have the popular slides remained, but they are adding more. And in case you were disappointed when they removed the water elements, worry no more. The Cascades are a fountain for play and The Pond runs along the historic Burlington Building and Greenhouse Apartments. A new addition is the Boat Cove where you can drive your remote controlled boat. The steps remain and are repurposed as the Cove Amphitheater. Bring your dog to the dog park where he can run free. And an important feature that was missing from this park in the past was restrooms. There will be restrooms that will be open, clean and stocked.

So much to look forward to! I hope you will join us on July 4<sup>th</sup> for the grand opening walking tour, either as a walker or as a volunteer.

Sources: *The Lincoln Star*, *The Omaha World Herald* and *The RiverFront*

~Sandy

# Apple Blossoms in Nebraska City





## Mark your calendars: Upcoming Events!!

### May

- 7 CASA 6th Annual Charity Walk, Leavenworth KS ..... Kansas JayWalkers
- 7 Florissant Walk, Florissant MO ..... St Louis Walkers
- 12-15 Beloit, Lincoln, Osborne, Phillipsburg, Smith Center & Stockton KS Walks ..... Sunflower Sod Stompers
- 14 Honeybees in the Heartland, Auburn NE ..... Nebraska Trailblazers
- 14 Heartbeat of the Heartland, Humboldt NE ..... Nebraska Trailblazers
- 14 Carondelet Park & Neighborhood Walk, St. Louis MO ..... Gateway Milers
- 14 Crosby-Manitou State Park Spring Fun Walk, Silver Bay MN ..... NorthStar Trail Travelers
- 15 Temperance River State Park Walk, Silver Bay MN ..... NorthStar Trail Travelers
- 20-22 Northern Iowa Weekend ..... Greater Des Moines Volkssport Assn
- 21 Northwest Nebraska Volksmarch, Chadron NE ..... Nebraska Trailblazers
- 21 Verona Walk, Verona WI ..... Madison Area Volkssport Assn
- 21 Minnesota River Trails, Bloomington MN ..... Twin Cities Volkssport

### June

- 4 Grand Island Historical Walk, Grand Island NE ..... Nebraska Trailblazers
- 4 Crazy Horse Spring Walk, Crazy Horse Memorial, SD ..... Black Hills Volkssport Assn
- 11 Hennepin County Walk, Brooklyn Park MN ..... Lake Country Wanderers
- 11 Walk the Path of the 1972 Flood, Keystone SD ..... Black Hills Volkssport Assn.
- 18 Vanocker Watershed Walk, Sturgis SD ..... Black Hills Volkssport Assn.
- 25 Glendalough State Park Walk, Battle Lake MN ..... NorthStar Trail Travelers
- 26 Glacial Lakes State Park Walk, Starbuck MN ..... NorthStar Travelers

## In Memory



### **Bonnie Jean Christensen**

Please note below information regarding the passing of Bonnie Christensen. Bonnie was a very active walker and many of us remember her with great fondness.

Bonnie Jean Christensen, 87, passed away April 28, 2022 in West Des Moines, Iowa. Bonnie was a charter member of the Greater Des Moines Volkssport Association. She enjoyed

traveling and was especially fond of her Volkssport trips to Europe. She and her friend, Ardith, completed sanctioned Volkssport walks in 32 different countries. She and Ardith travelled extensively, visiting 62 countries and all 50 states.

## NWFT Officers

President  
Steve Burkland

Secretary  
Dave Brown



Vice President  
Lori Sue Anderson

Treasurer  
Jill Champley

### Speakers

June 6	Nebraska Passport
Sept 12	NE Office on Aging
Oct 3	TBA
Nov 7	Joslyn Castle
Dec	TBA



### Meeting News

Our next meetings will be June 6 at Morning Star Lutheran Church, 331 S 85<sup>th</sup> Ave., Omaha, at 7:00 p.m. The meeting will be held in the chapel area (masks are required). with a short program before the business meeting. Just a reminder that the club meetings are the 1<sup>st</sup> Monday of the month at 7:00 p.m. with some exceptions: no meetings in January, July or August, and it is the 2<sup>nd</sup> Monday in September. Don't forget that at each meeting, we have a drawing for a \$10 door prize. Contrary to popular belief, you don't have to be a club member to win this.

### Club Dues

Club dues are \$10 for a single membership and \$15 for a family membership, prorated for the year (see membership form on our website).

Please send renewals to: NWFT  
PO Box 8147  
Omaha NE 68108

### Send in Your Newsletter Info

To place info/articles/photos in the next newsletter: NWFT, PO Box 8147, Omaha NE 68108