

# SWELL LETTER

## April 2025 Volume 5, Issue 4

### Stress Reduction and Brain Health through Deep Sleep

#### I. The Burden of Stress

- A. Overload: Our modern lives often lead to stress through excessive demands on our time, energy, and resources. This can include work pressures, family responsibilities, and social obligations.
- B. Negative Life Events: Stress can be triggered by challenging life events such as job loss, relationship difficulties, illness, or the death of a loved one.
- C. Information Overload: The constant influx of information from technology and media can overwhelm our minds, leading to stress and mental fatigue.
- D. Sleep Deprivation: Lack of sufficient deep sleep disrupts cognitive processes, leading to disorganized thoughts, poor concentration, and increased emotional reactivity.

#### II. Deep Sleep: A Sanctuary for the Brain

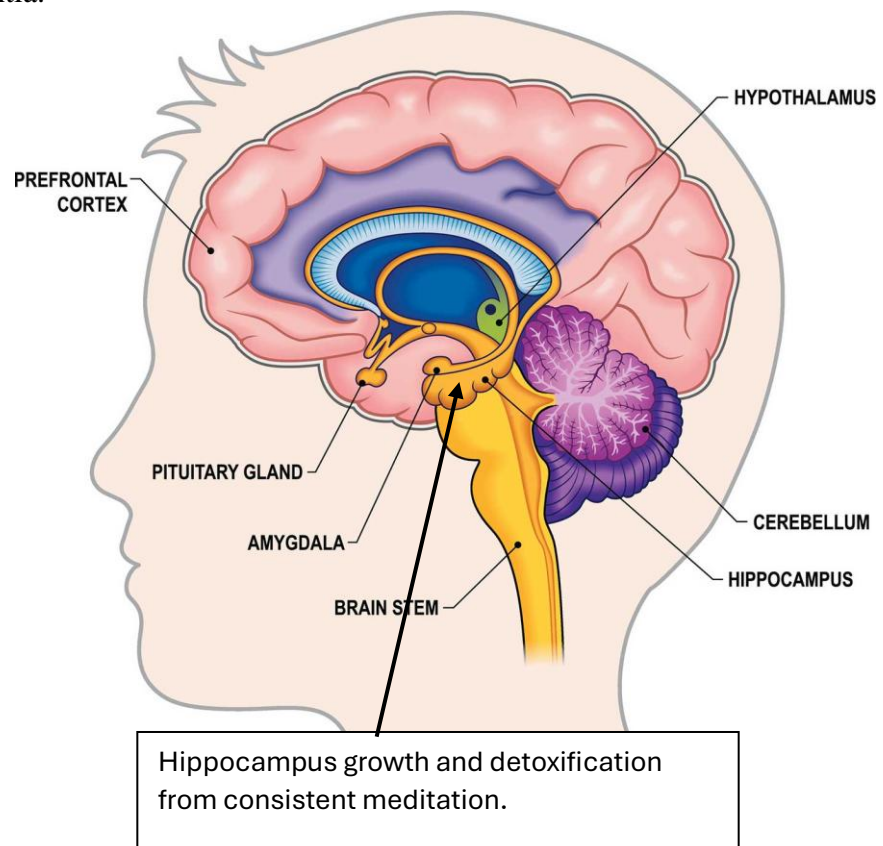
- A. **Hippocampal Rejuvenation:** Deep sleep plays a crucial role in clearing and detoxifying the hippocampus, a brain region essential for learning and memory. This process removes metabolic waste products that accumulate throughout the day.
- B. Benefits of a Rested Hippocampus: A clean and well-rested hippocampus contributes to:
  - Enhanced cognitive function and mental clarity.
  - Improved mood and emotional regulation.
  - Increased feelings of relaxation, focus, and energy upon waking.
- C. Deep Sleep's Protective Powers:
  - **Hippocampal Growth:** Deep sleep promotes the growth and strengthening of the hippocampus, improving its capacity for learning and memory consolidation.
  - **Amyloid Beta Removal:** During deep sleep, the brain efficiently clears Amyloid Beta (AB), a protein that forms harmful plaques associated with Alzheimer's disease.
  - **Neuroprotection:** By reducing AB plaque buildup, deep sleep helps protect against neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's and dementia.

#### III. Meditation: A Pathway to Profound Sleep

- A. Circadian Rhythm Alignment: Regular meditation practice helps regulate the body's natural 24-hour cycle (circadian rhythm), promoting healthy sleep patterns.
- B. Enhanced Sleep Quality: By aligning circadian rhythms, meditation improves overall sleep quality, including the duration and depth of deep sleep. This leads to the restorative benefits for the brain and body outlined above.

#### References:

- While the initial text provided a foundation, the claims about deep sleep's benefits are supported by a growing body of research. For specific studies and expert opinions, you could explore resources like the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the National Sleep Foundation.
- The link between meditation and improved sleep is also well-documented. Research published in journals like "JAMA Internal Medicine" and "Sleep" supports this connection.





## Lisa Wittman



I am a lifetime Dubuquer and grew up in Key West as Lisa Hoerner. I have one brother Bill, and I met Gary at age 20 and was married 3 years later in November 1983. We have 5 children and 7 grandchildren. Our kids are scattered in California, Colorado, Minnesota, DeWitt and Dubuque. My working career consisted of 46 years in banking retiring April 2024. I Joined SWELL shortly after in June 2024

My interests started with distance running. Beginning in my sophomore year at Dubuque Senior High School, where I participated in the first women's cross-country team. This marked the start of a competitive running career that spanned eight years of road races including placing 4<sup>th</sup> at the Bix 7 overall women and still holding records at the Dubuque

Benefit Class half marathon, the Governor's Cup 10K in Des Moines and winning the Iowa Grand Prix Road racing circuit as the overall women runner in 1985. After stepping back from competitive running to start a family, I maintain an active lifestyle through walking and engaging in hands-on activities like landscaping our yard. I also enjoy spending quality time with family and friends. Since retiring I have completed the master gardener certification. I am in my 3<sup>rd</sup> term as vice president on the Dubuque Community School board and like to volunteer in the community.



What I like most about SWELL is the social connections when meeting new people. I also have realized since joining the class the benefits of stretching.

A fun Face. Our family was chosen to be on "Fear Factor Home Invasion" With Joe Rogan who came to our house with the challenge in 2004. We won the challenge of drinking worm wine, receiving a \$5,000 cash gift card.

### Tim and Claudette in the Bahamas

During the time that Tim and Claudette were in the Bahamas they kept up with SWELL. They walked the Sidney Poitier Bridge that connects New Providence to Paradise Island. Claudette enjoyed some of the local food and they both were entertained by a calypso band. The temperature was mostly in the high seventies. It was truly Paradise. The famous Atlantis Hotel can be seen in the background.





## Marian Walker



In looking for a quick start to this, the last profile that I wrote was for a dating website over 20 years ago! I'm not sure I ended up with who I was looking for but probably ended up with someone better in Gary Conlon! We had our first date 20 years ago this month and have been married for 14. His children and extended family have been a wonderful addition to my small family. We have a granddaughter Mila and a grandson arriving soon – both in Ankeny. I went to Hope College, then worked at the University of Iowa for 4 years before going back to graduate school at Indiana University School of Optometry. I have worked at Medical Associates Clinic for almost 31 years in the Ophthalmology Department and have seen lots of changes in the eye care field. I have a small sailboat "Optical Illusion" that I keep at the YardArm and hope to spend more time sailing this summer. I belong to the local Fleur-de-Lis Chapter of The

Embroiderers' Guild of America and enjoy most types of needlework. I run the live streaming and belong to the bell choir at my local church. I enjoy reading and discussing books with my neighborhood book club. We like to travel –



we went to Italy last year on the Royal Clipper and next summer we will cruise on her Sister ship the Star Clipper in Greece, Croatia and Italy. A friend told me about SWELL and said that Gary should join – he didn't listen to his wife! Luckily someone else told him about it again a couple of months later and he has since been its most loyal and enthusiastic attendee. I am currently working part-time and recovering from a minor back surgery and have been able to attend twice a week. I plan on retiring in June and look forward to adding the third day. I enjoy meeting new friends and seeing old friends as we exercise and walk together. I still haven't decided if I like Tai Chi...??





## The Snowbirds Return

I have heard from the snowbirds, and they are ready to return home after a great time in Palm Springs, CA. Kendra Kunkel tells about their trip.



February and March were brimming with physical activities for the Swell members during their annual getaway to Palm Springs, California. We kept active with twice-weekly golf sessions—ladies on one team and men on the other—along with a weekly round of co-ed golf with our spouses. There were also twice-weekly, one-hour water aerobics classes. On top of that, Ken and I hit Planet Fitness regularly and walked several miles daily. Within our group, weekly pickleball games brought a fun, competitive spirit—especially since we learned to play this year! We also joined several group hikes. It was an unforgettable time filled with fantastic activities, delicious food, and cherished friends.

February also marked a milestone—Ken's 70th birthday! We celebrated with a dinner party for 12. A few days later, our daughters surprised him by flying out for a four-day weekend of celebrations.

Later, we took a trip to Phoenix for three days to join our oldest daughter and her family during their spring break. We played games with our grandkids and even went on a three-mile mountain hike! Unfortunately, I had a minor mishap, slipping on sharp rocks just a quarter mile from the car. The silver lining? Nothing was broken. The downside? I was left with some serious bruises and soreness for days. Thanks to Swell Class, I was able to bounce back quickly!



**--Kendra Kunkel**



## How old are we in SWELL years?

We can estimate longevity by looking at average lifespans for people and animals. In 2024, the average life expectancy in the United States was 73.2 years for men and 81.1 years for women. However, this average includes individuals who do not participate in SWELL or who only participate part-time.

My goal for all SWELL members is to become a **centenarian** and defined as someone who reaches 100 years or more. This would put us on the list of only **5 Blue Zones** in the world. Not an easy task in Dubuque Iowa.

SWELL participants often experience improved toning, flexibility, and cardiovascular fitness, effectively becoming "younger." After 38 years of instructing SWELL, it's been observed that consistent participation leads to improved and maintained fitness, allowing many members to live well into their 90s.

The average American's life expectancy is lower due to factors like **heart disease, cancer, and dementia**. However, these can be mitigated through diet, minimizing toxin exposure, meditation, and consistent SWELL exercise.

Dr. Lewina Lee, PhD, Assistant Professor of Psychiatry and Clinical Research Psychologist at Harvard University, conducted research analyzing data from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' aging study, encompassing 69,744 women and 1,429 men. The findings indicate that **optimists, on average, live 11 to 15 percent longer than pessimists**. Furthermore, optimists exhibit a significantly higher likelihood of achieving "exceptional longevity," defined as **reaching the age of 85 or older**.

"I've observed many participants in the SWELL program achieving ages over 85. This is incredibly inspiring! **The following calculation is based on my personal observations, not formal research, and is intended purely for motivational purposes.**

### Calculating SWELL Years

To determine your "SWELL age," use the following formula:

$(100 - \text{Average US life expectancy} - \text{Your actual age}) = \text{SWELL years}$ .

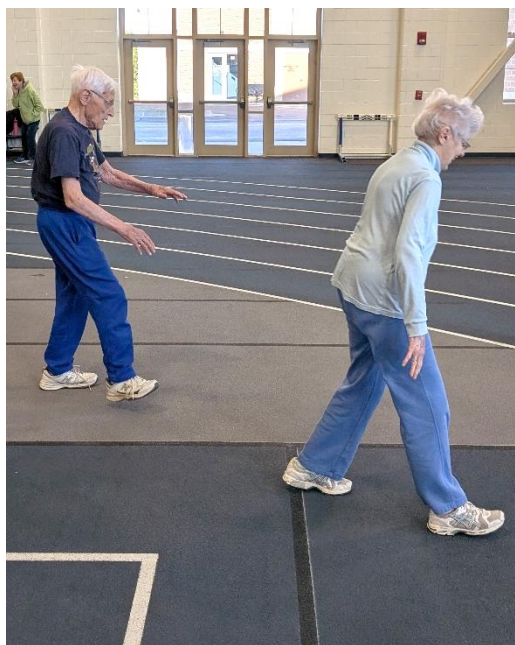
- Average US life expectancy (men and women combined) is approximately 77.5.
- Example 1: For someone aged 65:  $(100 - 77.5) - 65 = -42.5$  SWELL years.
- Example 2: For someone aged 100:  $(100 - 77.5) - 100 = -77.5$  SWELL years.

**Reaching 77.5 SWELL years equates to being a centenarian.** We can call it 100 with pride.

### The Mindset of a Centenarian

A key aspect of becoming a centenarian is maintaining a **youthful mindset**. Thinking of 100 years as 77.5 SWELL years can help foster this attitude. **Avoiding the perception of being "old" at 80 or 90 is crucial**, as it can lead to self-limiting beliefs based on average life expectancies.

Adopting a positive self-image, practicing healthy habits, and consistently engaging in SWELL exercises are essential for achieving the goal of becoming a centenarian.



Don and Wilma Sanders have a youthful mindset to keep going and are getting close to becoming centenarians.

--Gary

# An army of volunteers

They say “it takes an army.” When it comes to the Julien Dubuque International Film Festival, the logistics are large and complex, with much of it taking place behind the scenes.

Now in its 14th year, the festival continues to grow, with volunteers needs to match. This year, the festival received more than 1,000 film entries. Submissions take all forms, from short shorts (two to 20 minutes in length) to long shorts (21 to 49 minutes), as well as documentaries, features and more, each film



Dave and Ruth Assmus are the volunteer coordinators for Julien Dubuque International Film Festival.

entry is screened by a team of reviewers. Only approximately 175 films make the cut and are admitted into the festival. Approximately 120 volunteers, mostly in Dubuque, make up the film review panel. There are three teams of about 35 reviewers each. Each film is reviewed by at least 10 team screeners.

Objectivity is important to the process. A rubric is used to objectively score each film on aspects such as Story Writing, Editing, Performances, Cinematography and other factors.

Ann Cooper, of Dubuque, serves as one of the team captains.

“We select a wide variety of films,” Cooper said. “So, everybody can find something they like. If you like documentaries, we have a bunch. If you like funny ones, we have comedies. There’s something for everyone. On my team, we have almost all Dubuquers, or people who have a connection to Dubuque. We’re not experts in film, but anybody can have an opinion.”

Lisa Landgraf, of Dubuque, does double duty, helping review films, but also assisting with the ticketing operation. “I started volunteering in 2021,” Landgraf said. “With my background in technology, ticketing was an area that needed

some help and attention, so that’s what I gravitated toward. We’ve met some cool people. They love to talk about their movies, and some of the attendees we’ve met have starred in the films.”

As a reviewer, Landgraf said she is fascinated by the quality of the films that come to Dubuque.

“It’s amazing,” she said. “We get films here that end up being shown on streaming services.”

Technology plays a big role in the festival. Every venue has films loaded into a custom Roku screening system that’s easy for volunteers to operate.

There are eight film venues and an additional three event site, all staffed by volunteers.

This year, the festival increased from five to seven days, adding two dates (Monday, April 21, and Tuesday, April 22) in Galena. As the festival gets closer, there is a myriad of logistics that need to be managed, including ticketing and venue staffing.

Beginning six to nine months in advance, the ticketing system is reviewed and updated as needed. Sponsors, both corporate and individual, are lined up.



Volunteers serve as local drivers, host workshops and panels, set up and tear down venues and also can be “assigned as needed.”

Dubuquers Ruth and Dave Assmus serve as volunteer co-coordinators.

” Volunteers are the backbone of the festival,” Ruth said. ” JDIFF has an excellent reputation in the film industry because of the hospitality shown by volunteers and the rest of the community.

Ruth and Dave started volunteering 12 years ago and took over the co-coordinators positions four years ago.

“We inherited a lot of great volunteers from our predecessors,” Dave said. ” Our role is to be good stewards of the volunteers, to train them and help them.”

As the festival rolls around, volunteers need to kick into high gear. Filmmakers arrive from around the world (including

such faraway places as London, Thailand, Australia and Toronto), in addition to cities around the U.S. Some need transportation from airports and a few stay in volunteers’ homes in the Dubuque area.

Other volunteers work the box office at Hotel Julien Dubuque, staff venues and scan tickets or drive vans to transport attendees from one location to another.

People interested in volunteering can visit [julienfilmfest.com/volunteer](http://julienfilmfest.com/volunteer).

### **A Senior Guide to Exercising Safely** **Submitted by John Richey**

The article talks about how **important exercise is for individuals over the age of 50**. But it emphasizes the importance of safety and not overdoing it. That is why at SWELL we always say go at your own pace. We know that pushing it too hard can cause injuries. **Find an activity you like** that will keep you coming back. Most people who have started SWELL tend to stick with it. However, SWELL only works for you if you do it. **Start slowly and increase gradually**. It is recommended that you start at 2.5 hours of aerobics per week and combine with strength exercises again this sounds like SWELL. I would say that after the first month you could work a little harder. But don’t overdo it. **Warm up before activity**, like walking so come to SWELL a little early and walk before we start our strength exercises. It’s not a good idea to rush through the door and start lifting your weights. Also, as I have said before, get a few laps cool down in before you leave to rid your body of built-up lactate. **Stay hydrated**, we are working out for at least an hour so you should stop by the drinking fountain and have a drink. Research shows that dehydration can cause you to faint, which contributes to falling. Remember falling is the number one cause of accidental death after age 65. **Know your Limits and adapt**. Start easily and increase when you are ready. You should not force the pace it should come naturally. If it becomes too easy increase gradually, this can also motivate you when the routine becomes stagnant. **Focus on some balance activities**. I think we have that covered with the Golden Rooster and Praying Mantis. This is another way to help prevent falling and will help us become more stable. It is important for seniors to find ways to do safe physical activity and promote good health. Consistency is also important. You need to get up each day and exercise. Don’t forget you can do our class on Tension Zen Mind and Body on Patreon. The link to join is below after healthy recipe.



### **University of Dubuque Earns eight All-American Honors at NCAA Indoor National Championships**

**Jayden Williams, our Spring 2024 SWELL intern**, achieved remarkable success at the NCAA Division III Indoor National Meet held at Nazareth University in Rochester, NY, on March 14th and 15th. Specifically, Jayden placed 8th in the triple jump, reaching a distance of 48 feet and 5.496 inches. Notably, on Friday, March 14th, **Jayden set a new University of Dubuque indoor triple jump record**. The University of Dubuque team also performed strongly, placing 10th out of 65 scoring teams. Placing Blake Hardison in the 60 meter hurdles, Andrew Hutchinson school record in the 800 and Jaberrius Peake, Otis Patterson, Kali Freeman, and Andrew Hutchison in the 4x400 meter relay.

## Upcoming performances and Dates

**Heritage Center**  
**104 years of Broadway by Neil Berg and Natlie Harvey**  
**Friday, May 9, 2025, at 7:30 pm**



Direct from New York and featuring Dubuque native Rita Harvey, producer/pianist/composer Neil Berg returns to Heritage Center with a sequel to his hit Broadway revue with a cast of stars from Broadway's greatest musicals. Neil shares the songs and stories behind the music that changed the world! 104 Years of Broadway recreates the greatest moments from the finest shows of the past century.

**Event: SWELL (Last show of the year 104 Years of Broadway)**

**Ticket Price: \$46.00 per ticket (main floor)**

**Payment Method: Cash in an envelope**

**Envelope Labeling:**

- Clearly print the names of the ticket holders on the outside of the envelope.

**Payment Collection Period:**

- Now through April 30th

**Ticket Distribution:**

- Friday, May 2nd through Friday, May 9<sup>th</sup>

**Important Dates: University of Dubuque Spring Commencement**

- **University of Dubuque Spring Commencement:**
  - Saturday, April 26, 2025, at 1:00 p.m.
  - Location: Chlapaty Recreation and Wellness Center
- **SWELL will be on the Outdoor Track (Due to Commencement Set-Up and Tear-Down):**
  - Wednesday, April 23rd
  - Friday, April 25th
  - Monday April 28th.





## Ellec Armstead High Energy Recipe

### Cookie Dough Protein Bites

Prepared by Mary, Emma, and Lisa

These cookie dough protein bites combine simple ingredients that can be adapted for any flavor preferences and/or allergies. The ingredients are stirred together in 1 large bowl and then rolled into balls. You'll need:

1. 2 Cups Oat Flour: You can find this at your local grocery store, or you can either make your own by blending oats in a blender or food processor until flour texture, then measure out 2 cups.
2. 1/3 Cup Protein Powder: Keep in mind that all protein powders are different but use what you prefer and love. Depending on the brand *you may* need to add slightly more milk.
3. 1/2 Cup Nut Butter: Any nut butter can be used but each kind can alter the taste. Peanut Butter is a favorite, but I like to use Almond butter. If you're using natural nut butter, mix it well and *you may* need slightly less milk.
4. Tablespoons Honey or Maple Syrup: I recommend honey or maple syrup, but coconut sugar or agave work too—though you may need to adjust the amount slightly and/or add more milk.
5. 2 teaspoons Vanilla Extract: Adds that classic cookie dough flavor.
6. 1/2 Cup Milk: Use the variety of milk that you drink.

For this recipe, I also like to add 1/4-1/3 cup of chocolate chips; can use the mini chocolate chips to get more in each cookie. Feel free to leave them out completely if you're one of the "pick around the chocolate chips" in cookies.

#### Instructions

1. Line a baking sheet or plate with parchment paper or a silicone baking mat. Set aside.
2. In a large bowl, whisk together the oat flour and protein powder. Using a rubber spatula or wooden spoon, stir in the nut butter, maple syrup, vanilla, and milk. (I like to warm the honey and nut butter together to make them mix easier) The mixture should be like a cookie dough consistency—come together but shouldn't be sticky. If it's too dry, add 1 Tablespoon milk. Stir in the chocolate chips, if desired.
3. Using a cookie scoop or spoon, grab 1.5-2 Tablespoons of dough and roll into balls. Set the rolled balls on the baking sheet or plate as you finish the rest. Store in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 1 week.



## Important meditation and sleep audio tracks to reach the “Blue Zone.”



Research from the Cleveland Clinic shows that meditation can help you achieve deep, delta sleep. To maximize your chances of reaching this restorative sleep stage that eliminates Amyloid Beta that makes plaque that causes dementia, the Cleveland Clinic recommends:

- A consistent bedtime routine
- A relaxing, dark, and quiet sleep environment
- Avoiding stimulants like caffeine and alcohol close to bedtime
- Regular exercise (but not too close to sleep)
- Relaxation techniques like meditation or deep breathing

**Tension Zen Mind and Body** on Patreon offers 2 audio tracks to help you sleep better including the 20-minute meditation experience after lunch daily and the 7-minute Tension Zen Deep Sleep Experience when you go to bed and repeat if you wake up at night to go back to sleep.

**Our Tension Zen meditation app is available on Patreon!**

For just \$1 a month, you'll gain access to a wealth of resources designed to improve your physical and mental well-being. For \$2 a month you will gain access to SWELL workouts and Tai Chi.

<https://www.patreon.com/TensionZen>

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**Healthy Energy Recipe ..... Ellec Armstead**

**Thanks to those who submitted wonderful articles to our SWELL newsletter.**



