

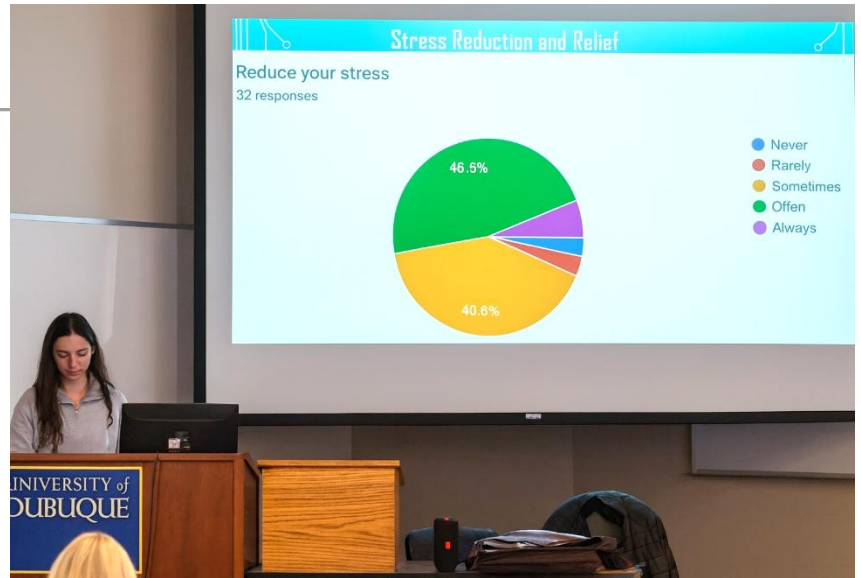
SWELL LETTER

December 2025 Volume 5, Issue 12

Zoe and the Tension Zen Meditation Sleep Study

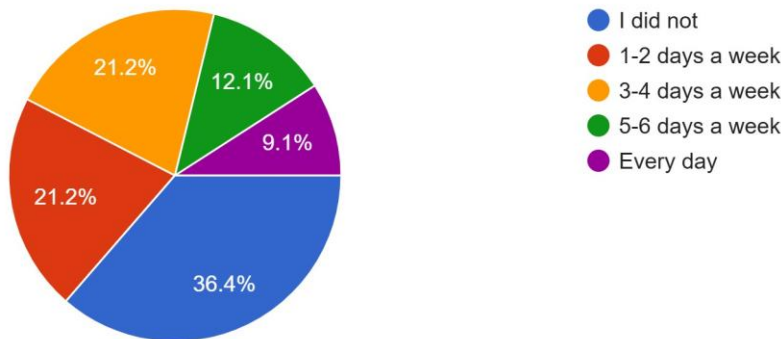
Study Goals: Physiological & Psychological Endpoints

The primary goal of the study is to achieve measurable improvement for participants in three core areas, covering both physiological and psychological endpoints:



Daytime

How often did you meditate during the day?
33 responses



Decrease in psychological and physiological stress

31/32 Improved Sleep, Stress, and Calmness.

Increased consistency in meditation practice resulted in significantly higher scores.

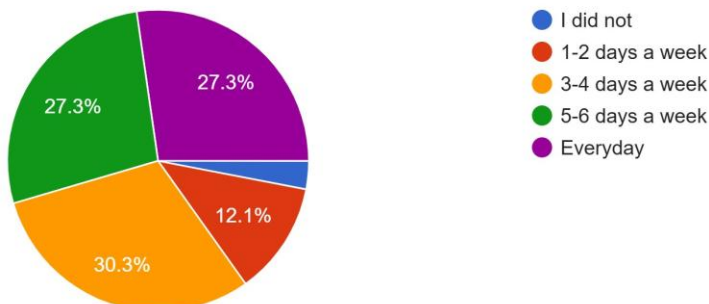
Improving efficiency, duration, and restorative nature of sleep.

31/32 Improved Tasks, Focus, and Memory.

Increased consistency in meditation practice resulted in significantly higher scores.

Bedtime

How often did you use the "Deep Sleep- Sleep Imagery" audio over the 7-week period?
33 responses



Looking for positive shifts in general well-being and health.

31/32 Improved Attitude, Memory, Balance, and Energy.

Increased consistency in meditation practice resulted in significantly higher scores.

WHAT DID WE LEARN

Dedication: We need to be more explicit.

Deep Sleep App., $31/32 = 4.7$ days per week average.

Day Time Meditation App. $20/32 = 4.5$ days per week average.

Stress importance of Day Time Meditation: The more you do it the better it will work.

App improvement: Don't change app during the study even if participants request it.

Don't focus on voice: Concentrate on instructions and breathing not who's voice it is.

Don't bail on the study: Give it time, you will realize results. Not the process, it's the affect.

Explain that changing habits as a senior can be difficult: We get stuck in our ways.

Turn phone ringer off at night to prevent sleep disturbance: Phone is by your bed.

If you are sleeping with a partner: Use ear buds or have your partner, do it with you.

How many of you would like to do this survey again?

We would like to thank you for your participation. We have learned a lot.



I have had such a wonderful experience interning here at SWELL. It has been truly an honor to have the opportunity to meet all of you and learn about the things in your lives that you value. I greatly appreciate the conversations before and after class with the advice and knowledge you all have given me. It was inspiring to see so many people coming to class excited to get younger every day and put effort into exercising. Leading the class in the exercises has been such a pleasure for such an amazing group in the past few months. Learning about Tai Chi and eventually leading it on my last day has been such a fun new experience for me. Seeing the results of the Meditation Study was also very interesting, it really benefited some of your daily lives. I have grown so much as a person through this experience. Thank you all for being so welcoming and making this experience so great. Another BIG thank you to those who participated in the Meditation Study and those supported the UD softball team with the raffle tickets. I am going to miss coming to class and I wish you all to stay SWELL!

--Zoe

We thoroughly enjoyed having you as our SWELL intern this semester Zoe. Your diligence, empathy, and focus have truly distinguished you as one of the best interns we have ever had. You consistently went the extra mile, particularly by leading the Meditation Study and dedicating time to connect with SWELL members before and after class; these actions demonstrated a personal commitment to the well-being of others. Your deep sense of care will undoubtedly lead you to great success in whatever path you choose. Thank you for your exceptional contributions as our Fall 2025 Intern, and we wish you the very best.

Zoe's Last Day



**Thank you for Zoe you for giving it 100%. We are happy that you enjoyed your experience with SWELL.
Good Luck as you pursue your dreams. And Rember "Be Well Be Swell."**

Happy **75th** Wedding Anniversary



Donald and Wilma Sanders of Dubuque are celebrating their 75th Wedding Anniversary on November 19th.

They are blessed with 3 children, Paula, Linda and David, 6 grandchildren, Rachael, Nicholas, Jake, Dan, Kaitlyn and Erin, 11 great grandchildren, Eva, Caroline, Felicity, Abigail, Ray, Vincent, Jude, Brody, Carly, Eleanor and Owen.

Congratulations Don and Wilma, 37 years of SWELL and 75 years of marriage.

A Timeless Dream Broken: SWELL's Evening with "Of Mice And Men"



Fourteen SWELL members attended "Of Mice And Men" (not all pictured), immersing themselves in a classic tale by John Steinbeck's that has been transformed into one of the most emotional play performances ever written. We laughed, we cried, and were ultimately shocked by the heartbreaking turn of events.

We traveled back in time to the Dust Bowl of the 1930s, witnessing the stark reality of two migrant field hands: George, the average-looking, sharp-witted protector, and Lennie, the powerful, gentle giant with an intellectual disability. They find fleeting work on a farm in California

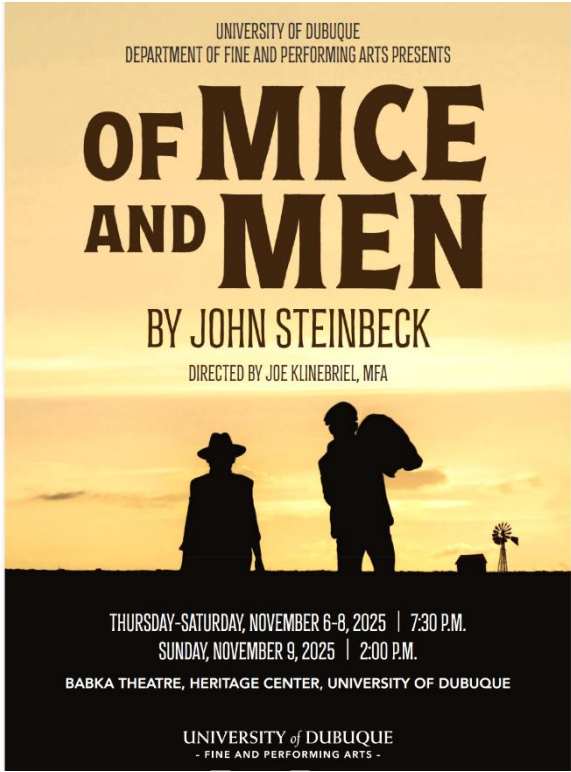
during the Great Depression, clinging to a shared, simple vision: to earn a stake, gain their own patch of land, and finally achieve a quiet, self-sufficient independence.

The performances by Chris Marriot Senior (GEORGE), Gabriel Green (LENNIE) Sophomore, and Lucas Federonich (CANDY) Sophomore didn't just play roles—they inhabited these struggling souls, breaking our hearts with the raw vulnerability of their simple dream. It is difficult to imagine the sheer exhaustion and constant struggle people endured during the Depression.

Director Joe Klinebriel, University of Dubuque Professor of Performing Arts, and UD Student Braeden Collins, Original Music Composer, brought this timeless story of friendship, hope, and tragedy to life. Through their masterful direction and creative score, they didn't just stage a play; they opened a window into the soul of a desperate time, reminding us that even the purest dreams are fragile things, easily crushed by fate and circumstance.

The power of their collaboration ensures that George and Lennie's longing for "a little piece of land" will continue to resonate deeply with all who witness it. We left the theater silenced, but our hearts were full of empathy for the lost dreams who yearned for a life just beyond their reach.

— Gary



				
Chris Marriott SR George	Gabriel Green SO Lennie	Lucas Federonich SO Candy	Braeden Collins Original Music	Joe Klinebriel Director

Holiday tradition: Preparations proceed for local Reflections in the Park display

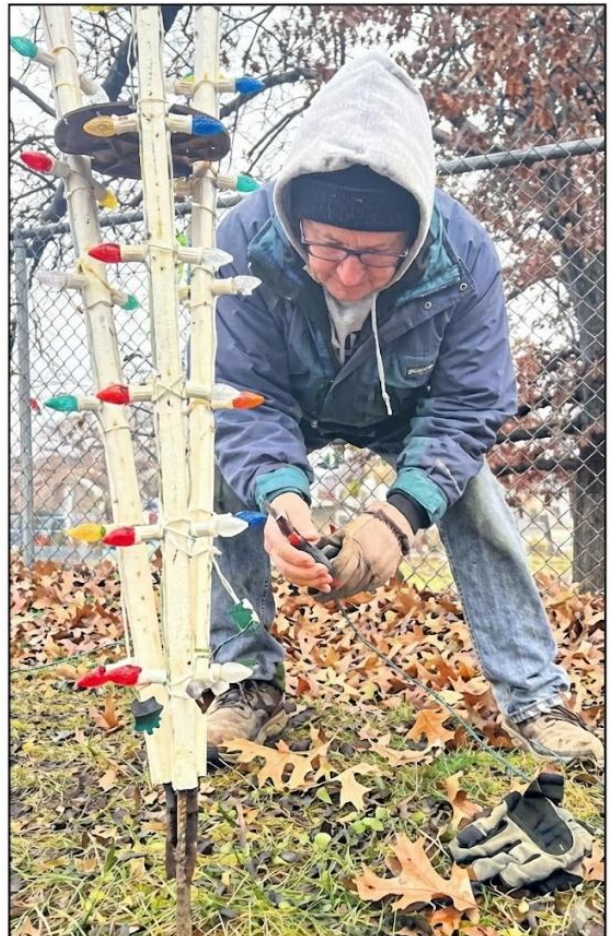
By Erik Hogstrom TH

Accustomed to spellbinding rides through the dazzling lights of Dubuque's Louis Murphy Park, Jared Krow knew the task ahead when the calendar switched from summer to fall.

"I have come through Reflections as a kid for as long as I can remember," said Krow, 23, a contract employee for Hillcrest Family Services who leads about 20 volunteers preparing the park for the agency's annual Reflections in the Park light display. After a walk-through event Nov. 26, the site will welcome vehicles from Nov. 27 through Jan. 4. "It was a tradition for my family to come every Christmas Eve, after Mass," Krow said. "Now, it's crazy that years later, here I am helping to put it all together." Launched in 1975, Reflections in the Park has become an important fundraising event for Hillcrest. Keith Rahe, Travel Dubuque's president and CEO, said the annual lights display plays an important role in local tourism. "May through November are our strongest months for visitors, so we are always looking for that kind of activity at that time of the year," Rahe said of the holiday- spanning lights display.

The display annually draws approximately 15,000 vehicles through the park's gates. "Something like that draws visitors from a 90- to 120-mile radius," Rahe said. "It is significant (for local tourism). There might not be many overnight stays (by visitors) because of it, but there is significant restaurant and convenience-store business."

Krow and his volunteers began preparation work in October, then started assembling displays and wiring in earnest Nov. 1. "I can't say 'thank you' enough to the volunteers," Krow said. Some of the volunteers have annually assisted for decades, and Krow draws on their experience in setting up this year's event. "You might put up Christmas displays at your house, but there's some things (about preparing for Reflections) that you would never know — like the amount of power that you put here or the amperage you have there," Krow said. Krow is cataloging all of the lessons gleaned from the preparations for this year's event. "That way, in the next two years, 10 years, and so forth, we will have a blueprint for how we do this every year," he said. Krow said he thinks of his own childhood experiences when he and the volunteers work to prepare the park for visitors. "Just giving that the same experience (I had as a kid) back to kids, grandparents, parents and anybody who comes through (the park), there's no feeling like it," he said. "It makes you feel good inside."



Volunteers Rick Rogers (left) and Eric Stierman work on a light display ahead of Hillcrest Family Services' annual Reflections in the Park event at Louis Murphy Park. Gary Gansemer (right) works on a light display. SWELL members help out because it is the right thing to do. -- Submitted by Bob Knepper

Generations of Generosity



Mary Pat and Michael Ament sit down for an interview with the Community Foundation about what inspires them to give back.

In Dubuque, giving is a way of life. Each day, someone can say they experienced the community's generosity, whether through the helping hand of a neighbor, the services of a nonprofit, or the lessons of a beloved relative.

The data reflects these experiences. In 2023, an analysis of income-tax returns by travel and business website Upgraded Points found that 41.7% included charitable contributions. That makes Dubuque not only the most charitable city in Iowa but also the sixth most charitable in the United States.

At the Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque, we see how our region has been shaped by generosity over time and how people today are instilling Dubuque's ethic of giving back in the next generation.

SPEND, SAVE, SHARE

Giving to charity is second nature to Michael and Mary Pat Ament. In setting aside a portion of their assets each year to donate, they know that the causes they care about will always be supported.

"Years ago, at our parish, one of the members of the congregation introduced tithing to us," Michael says. "It's, basically, to give 10 percent

— 5 to the church and 5 to other charities. He told us that once you start doing it, you won't miss it. We found this to be true."

Years later, that conversation with a fellow parishioner inspired the Aments to develop an estate plan and designate a portion of their assets to be donated to funds hosted by the Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque after they pass.

They also started working to instill that ethic of giving back in their grandchildren. Knowing that their adult children are providing the

grandchildren with everything they need to be happy and thrive, Michael and Mary Pat decided to do something a little different with their holiday gifts.

When the grandchildren were younger, the Aments would make donations to charity in the children's names — in addition to their wrapped presents. Now that the kids are older, "Nana" and "Bapa" have added a layer of responsibility to the charitable portion of the gifts.

"They get a letter and three envelopes: You spend some, you save some, and then you share some," Mary Pat says. "Now, that's just what Christmas is."

The Aments and their adult children also understand the importance of modeling phil-

anthropic behavior. Seeing their older family members volunteering and making charitable gifts has left an impression on the grandchildren, who range in age from tween to young adult. They give their time, talent and treasure to support causes in their communities, such as children's health care, youth with special needs, and animal rescue.

Just as Michael and Mary Pat were inspired to give back by their love for their Dubuque community, they want future generations to be driven by a similar love for their neighbors and the places they call home.

"I hope they carry forward a kind heart and generous spirit and do things for others," Mary Pat says. "And I hope they remember that giving was modeled for them."

--Submitted by John Richey

Social Connection at Panera Bread



From left to right Jeanann Cortes, Karen Smith, Darlean Sabers, Ginny Rauch, Verona Freiburger, don't know the next guy, Eileen Schueller, Theresa Harvey, and Thelma Schlueter.

I have heard a lot about the After-SWELL Panera Bread gathering so I thought I better check it out. It was a fun group. Not everyone was in attendance but don't miss it too often or you will be assigned to bring a treat when you return. The rule is if you miss 3 times in a row you have to bring a treat for everyone. Lynn Hawks was traveling, and it sounds like she will be the next to treat the group. It's a tough crowd you have to bring a treat on your own birthday also.

Another rule is you can't talk about politics or religion. When I asked what they talk about? The first thing that came up was Caitlin Clark. I guess they are women's basketball fans. Other topics were grandkids, recipes, how to solve the world problems nonpolitically, and how good they feel compared to non-SWELL goers that only talk about their aches and pains.

They also pointed out the guy's table, Al Cordes and Mr. Smith were at that table. Al now 93 was a LAFF assistant when I couldn't make it and Mr. Smith said that my Grandfather Albert Wittman pick their corn with his combine in Garber, IA 10 miles west of Guttenberg. Jean Ann Cordes also attended LAFF at Loras. Al and Jean Ann said they still feel the results of all our workouts they did years ago. The After-SWELL group are members of Panera Bread by purchasing a yearly coffee membership. They can drink unlimited coffee for a yearly membership of \$120.

--Gary

Katie Tracy, 43, of Dubuque, displays a photo of her husband, Jeff, who died in March.
Michelle London



When Katie Tracy and her husband, Jeff, left for work at their respective jobs one day last November, nothing hinted that life was about to split wide open.

Jeff, 46, was 6 feet, 7 inches tall; athletic; energetic; and the picture of health. But recently, he had been experiencing stomach discomfort and what he thought were neck spasms. Within days, the truth emerged — the spasms were seizures, and the discomfort was pancreatic cancer.

Four months later, at just 47 years old, Jeff was gone. Katie was 42. Their sons, Luke and Noah, were 14 and 10.

“You wake up one day, and you’re a family of four,” said Katie, of Dubuque. “And then everything you knew about your life is gone.”

The shock is something young widows often struggle to put into words. Life is full of work obligations, school pickups, sports practices, family gatherings. Then, without warning, it all becomes unrecognizable.

ADVERTISING

For Tracy, every day became a maze of caregiving, parenting and fear. After Jeff’s death, there was the hard work of finding a place where her grief made sense.

Most grief groups she tried

were filled with much older adults reflecting on long, full lives with their spouses.

“I’d sit there and think, ‘I can’t connect,’” Tracy said. “Our lives were so different. Our grief was different.”

Tracy’s mother, **Michelle Brown**, of Asbury, Iowa, would often attend the meetings with her.

“We tried everything,” Brown said. “But Katie needed people her own age who could understand losing a partner in the middle of raising kids. In the middle of building a life.”

Jeff’s cousin, Keri Gockel, 46, of Dubuque, lost her husband, Brian, to undiagnosed heart disease in 2022. He was 43 years old, and their daughters, Faith and Meredith, were 16 and almost 13.

“I didn’t feel like I fit in anywhere,” she said. “Nobody I knew my age was going through this. Where do you turn?”

Gockel reached out to Tracy after Jeff’s death, and the two became each other’s confidants through grief.

“I’ve been a social worker my whole life,” Brown said. “I thought there had to be a way to help these women get through this.”

Long before Tracy's loss, Molly Schreiber, of Dubuque, experienced a similar loss. In 2007, Schreiber's husband, Kyle, was killed in a crash at age 30. She was left with three children under the age of 3, including a set of twins.

"I'm a fighter," said Schreiber, 49. "But nothing prepares you for that kind of loss."

Schreiber began a young widow's support group in 2008. Six young widows meet weekly for six weeks. They built a curriculum and became anchors for one another.

Over time, the group evolved. The women eventually rebuilt their lives; some remarried or moved. Meetings became less frequent. After several years, the circle dissolved.

When Tracy's world shattered 16 years later, a former co-worker of Brown's reached out to Schreiber and connected her to Brown and Tracy.

At the same time, Dr. Eric Engelman, Jeff's oncologist, put the women in touch with Jess Kennedy, a nurse navigator at MercyOne Dubuque Cancer Center.

Part of Kennedy's responsibilities include facilitating support groups at the center, including groups for breast cancer, prostate cancer and a generalized cancer support group.

"Having resources locally is so much more impactful than sending people a few websites they can go to," she said.

"We need it, and I'm here to help in any way I can."

Tracy and Schreiber, with Kennedy's help, hope to launch a new young widow's support group in January. They have called the group FINE Young Widows.

"Not because we're fine, but because we aren't," Schreiber said. "People ask, 'How are you doing?' and the response is always, 'I'm fine.' But what that actually means is freaked-out, insecure, neurotic and emotional."

The new version of FINE Young Widows will allow young adults who have lost a spouse to feel comfortable sharing with those who have similar stories, even when nothing about their world feels steady.

"(With other groups here at the center), I see how they feel when they come in and when they leave," Kennedy said.

"It's like that burden has been lifted, even if just for that day."

The group will be supported by MercyOne Dubuque Cancer Center and Jess Kennedy's facilitation, along with the lived experiences of each member. A Facebook group has been created for early connections and access to the intake form.

"You just feel so alone," Tracy said. "Even with the best support system. You feel like everyone else's life is moving forward, and yours is frozen."

The new group is designed to thaw that loneliness through peer connection, and Keri Gockel is ready to join.

"Now, unfortunately, I can name so many people who are young widows or widowers," she said. "It's a club you never want to join. But it's good that it's there."

For information: talk to Michelle Brown in class or call her at (563) 543-5453.

Holiday CRWC closed dates Special events not listed I will announce these times and dates.

Christmas Eve December 24, 2025 - Wednesday

Christmas Day December 25, 2025 - Thursday

Christmas Day After December 26, 2025 - Friday

New Year's Eve December 31, 2025 - Wednesday

New Year's January 1, 2026 - Thursday

▪ **Mon., Jan 19, 2026**

▪ **Fri., April 3, 2026**

▪ **Mo., May 25, 2026**

Daily Hours For SWELL

SWELL starts walking 7:45 Friday Clark College Track Team / We can walk outside until 7:45. We cannot walk on the inside track when it is being, come dressed to walk outside on Fridays.

Exercise class 8:00 am to 9:00 am

SWELL walking after class 9:00 am to 9:45 am

Early walkers can walk in CRWC unless there are other rentals or University usage.

THE STAFF

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Article Submitted by Michelle Brown

Thanks to those who submitted wonderful articles to our SWELL newsletter