

SWELL LETTER

April 2025 Volume 5, Issue 6

Chuck & Dawn Andracchios Beachy Vacation!



In early May we visited Destin, FL, Gulf Shores and Orange Beach, AL. We were ready for a relaxing vacation and to celebrate our 20th wedding anniversary. The weather was 75-80 degrees every day. We

took lots of walks on the beach and around the quaint little towns. One day we had over 21,000 steps and didn't even realize it, thanks SWELL Class!

In Destin and Gulf Shores we enjoyed lots of fresh seafood for lunch and dinner while gazing at palm trees, beautiful white sand and blue waters. We also had two visits to a 50's themed dinner called

Sunline (see pic of Chuck & the pink Cadillac). It was what you would imagine in a 50's soda shop and restaurant would look like, and the ice cream drinks were made by an ice cream artist! We had heard

Destin has the most beautiful beaches in the world and in our experience they're right! The sand is like powdered sugar, and they keep the 20+ miles of beaches clean and groomed.

One thing that we did not know was happening upon arrival at Gulf Shores, the NCAA finals for Beach Volleyball. There were a few thousand people on a section of the beach and thank goodness we only

had to "share" our beach with them for a day! Apparently, they conduct that tournament every year at Gulf Shores so be aware if you plan a trip there in May. As we were driving from Destin

to Gulf Shores, we stopped in a little town called Navarre. A former Dubuquer and Wahlert volleyball player, Jennifer Welu, and her husband recently opened a brand-new, Happy Joes, so we stopped by to introduce ourselves and had a great conversation and a delicious breakfast burrito. Yes, they are open for breakfast as well as the typical lunch and dinner! It's the first one in Florida and the corporate office was anxious to find out how their new southern design would go

over. As much as we enjoy taking a vacation, it is always nice to get back home to our family and SWELL Community.





Mel and Theresa at Alma Mater

Recently Mel and Theresa Harvey visited Ohio State University where Mel graduated from the Physical Therapy Program. The campus has grown so much in 59 years! They were thrilled to locate their first apartment. These photos show the newlyweds in 1966, and the SWELL couple today. They couldn't have predicted that the arrival of baby **Rita** would bring them to **Dubuque**, where her extraordinary voice would be discovered. It was her **Hempstead High School vocal music teacher** who first recognized her potential, guiding her toward an opera major at **Simpson College**. At Simpson, Rita's voice matured, distinguishing her as one of the college's most remarkable vocal alumni. Her significant breakthrough arrived with her **Broadway debut**, stepping into the iconic role of Christine Daaé in *The Phantom of the Opera*.



The story continues as Rita met and married **Neil**



Berg, and they now tour the country, with Rita singing and acting in many of Berg's celebrated productions. We're fortunate to have such high-caliber Broadway performers grace the stage at the **UD Heritage Center**. Recently, Rita and Neil delighted SWELL members with their "**104 Years of Broadway**" performance, a truly memorable treat.

Rita with her SWELL parents Mel and Teresa Harvey.



SWELL photos by Karen Knepper

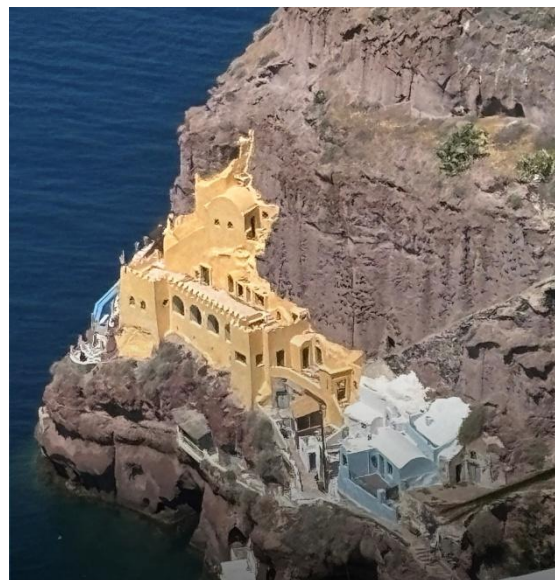
Mary Pat and Michael Aments Trip to Greece



"It's all Greek to me!"



That was definitely the case for my husband, Michael and myself this May. We were lucky enough to take a tour with Road Scholar to the Greek Islands. The entire experience was inspiring, engaging and relaxing all at the same time.



We traveled from island to island on a three-mast boat with 40 other travelers from all over the US. Our guides, one from Crete and the other from

Rhodes, were absolutely fabulous – knowledgeable, thoughtful about the group of travelers they were hosting and so proud to share their country’s culture, cuisine, colorful personalities and the rare treasure that each island had to offer. Many of our adventures were enhanced with tales of the Greek gods and goddesses.

Highlights included a bit of fun in Athens before embarking our boat and sailing off to the islands of Santorini, Crete, Karpathos, Rhodes, Patmos, Pyrgos and Delos – each with its own treasures to endear visitors.

We saw active archeological sites, museums containing treasures over 4,000 years old, amazing architectural feats from thousands of years ago, monasteries’, small villages beautiful coastlines and of course, the iconic white structures on all the islands that Greece is so famous for. We ate lots of seafood, fresh salads and decadent deserts every day, all day – a culinary feast!

The Road Scholar program is set up to not only take you to interesting places but to teach you about the area, the people, history, etc. If Greece is on your “bucket list”, Simply GO!

Article submitted by Hiram Melendez Hiram Melendez, a consistent top-5 finisher at the national level in Masters discus, is aiming for a breakthrough year. With a personal goal of throwing over 140 feet, Melendez is setting his sights on winning the Masters National meet. This year could be his year to achieve both.

Thu 29 May 2025

‘Start exercising!’: secrets of Thailand’s 105-year-old athletics champion

A recent winner of four Masters Games gold medals, Sawang Janpram began competing at 97 – motivated by his daughter, now 73.



Sawang Janpram, 105, with his 73-year-old daughter Siripan.

For the 105-year-old Thai athlete Sawang Janpram, the day normally starts at 5.30am. He has breakfast of two boiled eggs, some protein, vegetables and fruit, and by 6am or 7am he’s out at the beach or local stadium near his home in Rayong province, training with his 73-year-old daughter Siripan.

He will walk between 1km and 2km before doing a quick 100m run, once or twice. Then, he practices one of his other sports: javelin, discus or shot put.

Sawang’s training regime has proven effective – just last week, he won four golds at the World Masters Games in Taiwan. He was, media reports

remarked, in a league of his own at the event – as the oldest competitor at the games and the only person in his age group, he was almost certain to win the men’s 100-plus discus, javelin, shot put and 100m, which he completed in 38.55 seconds.

What’s the secret to his longevity and success? “Regular exercise, healthy food, staying in a good mood, always being calm, breathing clean air and keeping up good hygiene,” he says. “If I’m sick, I go to see the doctor.”

Sawang has always loved sports, watching it on TV or at local competitions. “I like to watch boxing, and my favorite is Pone Kingpetch,” he says, referring to Thailand’s first world boxing champion, who retired in the 1960s.

It was not until Sawang turned 97 that he began competing. He was inspired by Siripan, an athlete with the Thai Veteran [Athletics](#) Association, who would bring her father along to watch her compete at events. “He started to like the atmosphere because he could make new friends and see new people. He saw that even though the people involved were 60-, 70- or 75-year-old athletes, they were still able to participate,” says Siripan.



Sawang competed in the 100-plus age group at the World Masters Games in Taiwan, going on to win four gold medals. Photograph: I-Hwa Cheng/AFP/Getty Images

At first, Sawang’s family worried that the travel required for competitions may be too tiring. But 21 games and 78 medals later, it has all gone well, Siripan says.

There are days when he feels a bit lethargic, says Sawang with a laugh, but the sight of his daughter heading out normally spurs him on. “If I notice that he looks a bit tired, we just do walking, no jogging, or any other form of practice,” says Siripan. Going outside, and being active, has benefits beyond physical fitness. “I can see that he looks refreshed when he sees other people. It’s only two of us in the house, and it’s better to keep going out,” she

adds.

Sawang likes to eat vegetables and *nam prik pao* – a spicy dipping sauce made with chillies, shallots, garlic, dried shrimp and fish sauce – as well as *gaeng liang*, a vegetable soup, and *gaeng som*, a spicy and sour fish curry with rice. He rarely eats pork and mostly sticks to vegetables and fish.

Siripan explains that they eat healthily and that the air quality is good near to the beach where they exercise. Her father also keeps a positive attitude, he adds. “If he gets sick or needs to take medicine, he’s never stubborn about it.”

She believes the main barrier preventing older people in Thailand from exercising is a lack of support. “They don’t want to do it alone, and especially for elderly people, they need help and assistance,” she says. Thailand is considered an ageing society, with 20% of the population more than 60 years old.

“Elderly people especially can get quite lonely at home – their children or relatives are out at work, so they stay home all day alone,” she says. Exercise can “make them feel lively again”.

She hopes her father’s success will inspire others. “When I look at the comments on social media, I see a lot of positive responses. People are saying ‘Grandpa is so great’ and that they wanted to be fit as Grandpa,” she says. “I am very happy, and I’m very proud of my dad – that he stays strong and he has the discipline to keep fit. I know that he doesn’t want to be a burden to our family,” says Siripan, who also won two gold medals and a silver in Taiwan.

Both Sawang and Siripan plan to take a few days off after their success but will get stuck into training again next week. They are already gearing up to qualify for the 23rd Asia Masters Athletics Championships, which will be held in India in November.

“I want everyone to start exercising so they will be strong and not getting sick,” says Sawang. His advice to others who want to get fit. “If you go out to exercise with friends, you will get a chance to know them more – and it’s fun.”

Nature's Art

Tour of Gardens puts outdoor artistry on full display on June 21st **on June 21, 9:00 am to 4:00 pm**

BY MICHELLE LONDON • michelle.london@thmedia.com



Irish writer and poet Thomas Moore once opined that a garden “reconciles human art and wild nature, hard work and deep pleasure, spiritual practice and the material world. It is a magical place because it is not divided.”

It’s as good an explanation as any to explain the peace, the coziness, the pure joy that one often feels in a garden, whether you had a hand in its creation or not.

For the 24th year, Dubuque County Master Gardeners and Dubuque County Gardeners Inc. are hosting a tour of some of the area’s most beautiful gardens and landscapes. It is an opportunity to experience the magic of a garden — or six of them if you like — and take advantage of garden-related workshops at many of the stops along the way.

The gardens on this year’s tours include everything from majestic pines and waterfall features to yard art and walking paths.

“They’re different and varied every year,” said Sara Wagner, a master gardener and co-chair of the event for Dubuque County Master Gardeners.

“Some years we have more vegetables and fruit. Some years we have more perennials or landscaping. It’s a really great way to meet people in the community who have a common interest.”



One of the gardens on the tour belongs to Lisa and Gary Wittman, who built their home on Wittman family land. “My dad always told me ‘Don’t ever try to build there. It’s solid rock,’” Gary said. “Just 6 inches down, you hit solid rock, and it goes down for about 350 feet. We jackhammered for days when we built this house.”

That kind of terra firma would make most people decide a garden wasn’t worth the effort. But not Wittman’s. Most of the rock featured in the Wittman’s Garden are slabs excavated from their property. The only exception is the river rocks used to line the beds and banks of the two garden waterfalls.

The garden also features white pines, hydrangeas, jack pines, Mugo pines, crab apple trees, willow trees, a number of perennials and annuals and a variety of textural ornamental grasses.

Gary installed a watering system he built that can be turned on with the flip of a switch. He keeps a raised bed where he grows tomatoes, beans and wild onions.

“That’s really his thing, not mine,” Lisa said. She prefers the grand flowers produced by the garden’s limelight hydrangeas and climbing clematis and enjoys tending to the other trees and grasses in the garden.

“This is the fourth house we’ve built in our married life,” said Lisa, who recently received her Master Gardener certification. “We landscaped them all ourselves. We’ve never hired anyone. We just kept getting better at it.”



A firepit Gary built from stone on the property has gotten a lot of use in the 10 years the Wittman’s have lived there.

“I used to be the cross-country and track coach at Senior (High School),” he said. “I’d bring the team out here and we’d choose captains and set team goals, and we’d talk around the campfire. Now we use it for the Fourth of July and just throughout the summer.”

A male American goldfinch, its bright yellow feathers a contrast against the river rocks, flits

about one of the garden waterfalls, dipping its head for a drink and flipping its wings into the water.

The serene sound of the waterfall and the entertaining little bird does indeed make one think of spending the entire day surrounded by nature in a garden.

In addition to creating a peaceful space in their backyard, Lisa said one of the reasons she got her certification as a Master Gardener is to help create beautiful community spaces. “I want to volunteer more at the Arboretum,” she said.



Wagner is happy to hear that. “We put a lot of volunteer hours into places like Convivium (Urban

Farmstead), the (Dubuque) Arboretum and the River Museum,” she said. “We want to help make the community a more beautiful place.”

A new player in this year’s lineup is Wild Bull Flower Farm. It is the first time a producer has been part of the tour.

“We’ve never done anything like that,” Wagner said. “It will be interesting to see how people like it.”

If it proves popular, the organization might consider adding a similar stop to the tour each year.



“Putting a local grower into the lineup would be nice,” she said. “A CSA or a vineyard or an orchard. Wild Bull is a great place to start.”



On their fourth-generation family farm on Schueller Heights Road, sisters Laura Hodge and Dena Voss have transformed a traditional Midwest farm into a stunning flower farm.

While Dale Decker still works the farm the same way his father and grandfather did, his daughters have taken the lead from their grandmother,

The setting sun frames a field of sunflowers at Wild Bull Flower Farm.

Calista, who always kept parts of the farm impeccably landscaped. Their mother, Ann, is also an accomplished master gardener.

“We grew up out in Key West,” Hodge said. “Dad was out here every day because of the cows, so we would end up coming out here a lot and just hanging out and doing arts and crafts and running around. Grandma had it all landscaped, and it was like a little homestead when we were young.

When their grandparents passed away in 2019, Voss, who was living in Iowa City, made the decision with her family to move into her grandparents’ house on the property and begin renovations.

“My dad will farm this land until the day he dies,” she said. “But he wasn’t living on the property, and (as our grandparents got older), it needed some work. I had this vision of doing something with it, I just didn’t know what. But I was like, ‘I have to move here.’ The sisters hoped to bring that homestead feeling they remembered back to the 158-acre farm, and Hodge got the idea to start with dahlias.



“We thought we would just get it back to where it was (when my grandmother was alive),” she said. “It was just flowers and flowers and flowers. Pretty soon, we were spending a lot of money at Steve’s (Ace Hardware). I said, ‘We could probably start a flower farm,’ and it just hasn’t stopped.”

As far as infrastructure, Hodge and Voss have remodeled the machine shed, added a few new structures and restored a few others, including a new hoop building and the original chicken coop.

Wild Bull Flower Farm has more than an acre of cut flowers, 20 raised vegetable beds, hundreds of peonies and dahlias, fields of lavender and a couple of Mowing for Monarchs pollinator plots with close to 100 species of native plants. In addition, they’ve planted a small vineyard that yields grapes, cherries and a variety of berries, and have restored an orchard on the property that produces apples and pears.

Hodge and Voss usually have a cart filled with flowers for sale during the season at the entrance to the farm. They are selling for the first time this year at the Dubuque Farmers Market. They also create custom bouquets and centerpieces for weddings and other events.

“In all of the conversations about family and the farm (after our grandparents passed away), there was one thing that kept coming up in every conversation,” Hodge said. “We just wanted it to feel how it used to feel.”

Several of the tour stops will host workshops throughout the day, and complimentary garden tool sharpening will also be offered at one of the gardens. Workshop times are staggered so guests can plan their stops and workshop attendance.

“They’re mini workshops, so they’re only about half an hour,” Wagner said. “We try to stagger the times, offer them more than once and keep them short so people can plan their route and move through the gardens.”

The event will also be raffling off a custom painted garden bench courtesy of Painted Sky Designs, with proceeds going to the greenhouse program at the National Mississippi River Museum & Aquarium.

“(The garden tour) is the biggest fundraiser we have,” Wagner said. “It provides our operating expenses for the year. And it’s an opportunity to provide education to the community. We want to be visible to people and tell them about what we do and also provide resources to anyone in the community. Outreach is a big thing for us.”



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