

Winter 2025

TheParkNextDoor

magazine



Midwinter Moments

Look Inside For:

Festive Holiday Lights, Seasonal Reads, Let's Go Sledding!, First Day Hikes, Candlelight Hikes, New Year New Experiences, Firefly Grove Park, Winter Festivals and more.



Welcome to winter in Wisconsin, everyone!

Well, it looked like we were going to have a white Christmas with all that early December snow. But thanks to a couple warm-up days, it's nearly gone, and it doesn't look promising. Winter Solstice has arrived, however, along with the darkest day of the year. Tomorrow begins the ever-so-slow shuffle toward more daylight. Whether you enjoy the Christmas holiday or not, it's hard to deny the lift that the sparkle of holiday lights bring. When darkness takes over, like a star-filled sky, the twinkle of decorations are a welcome sight.

With all the activity this final month of the year brings, it's easy to be overwhelmed. We've got features to entertain, to celebrate, and to help you calm down when the pace gets to be too much. As always, our local nature spots can be a great source of seasonal joy and peace. Whichever you need, there are plenty of options.

If you've been too busy to get out to a holiday light show, there are several that run through the end of the year. A great way to light up the evenings between Christmas and New Year's Eve. You can find listings in our *January* happenings feature.

Need last minute gift ideas? *Share The Gift Of The Outdoors* has got you covered. You won't even have to leave the house.

When that next snowfall arrives, get outside and have some fun. *Let's Go Sledding!* has a long list of locations where you can hop on a toboggan and speed down a snowy hill.

Have you met Mama Rosa, the giant troll and resident of the new Firefly Grove Park in Wauwatosa? Let me introduce you. It's the *Spotlight Park* of the winter issue. Pay her a visit one winter day.

Need a moment of quiet? *Midwinter Beauty* and *At This Moment* are essays that reflect on finding just that during this hectic, and sometimes difficult time of year.

Enjoy a little "me" time, and escape with a good book. *Cuddle Up With A Cozy Winter Read* shares six seasonal titles that may fit just right.

And as the holidays fade into the distance, don't let the winter blues get you down. Our *January* and *February* happenings provide lots of opportunity to explore the outdoors, and your creative side in the coming year.

As this long year comes to a close, let me express my appreciation, *Dear Readers*. I've had some setbacks this year, health and otherwise, that made it more of a challenge to get out to explore, and share those explorations. I have hopes the coming year will bring more opportunities for outdoor adventures.

I wish for you and yours a very happy and peaceful holiday season.
And a new year filled with adventures gone local.

Happy New Year!

Kimberly



A traveler, singer, novice photographer, humane gardener, and nature lover. Documenting and sharing the beauty that is Wisconsin since 2014.

Cover photo taken at
Paradise Springs Nature Trail
in Eagle, WI

What's Inside

Winter is here again! We're well into December. The holidays are nearly upon us. Winter Solstice has arrived. Skip the mall and do a little easy holiday shopping online. Park passes are a great gift for others, and yourself. We've got the details. Get outdoors this winter for some sledding, maybe some ice fishing, a walk in the park after a fresh snowfall. There are plenty of location to choose from.

If you haven't gotten out to one of the holiday light shows, it's not too late. Our **December** happenings feature has details on six shows that will continue through to the end of the year. Fill the lull between Christmas and New Year with a bit of sparkle and a little less stress.

Relax and enjoy a holiday romance, mystery, or wax nostalgic about grade school antics. We've got six winter book titles to escape into. **Cuddle Up With A Cozy Winter Read** has the details.

Still have a few nature lovers on your gift list to satisfy? Passes to local, state, and national parks are great gifts. **Share The Gift Of The Outdoors** has the links you need to purchase them online.

We've got plenty of winter content online in our special features and blog. **Bits & Pieces** has links to several that will help with holiday shopping, feeding backyard birds, and more.

Act like a kid again this winter! **Let's Go Sledding!** has an extensive list of local sledding spots. It's a great way to burn some energy and enjoy the snow.

The arrival of the Winter Solstice marks the darkest day of the year, and the countdown to spring and brighter, longer days. **Midwinter Beauty** is an essay that reflects on just that.

If you're missing someone special this time of year, you're not alone. **At This Moment** reflects on weathering grief, sadness, and loss during this busy time.

Nevermind the resolutions. Just make plans to get outside for a bit of winter adventure instead. **January** happenings include free ice fishing days, eagle watching days, winter festivals, and a variety of classes and workshops to explore your inner artist.

Wisconsin State Parks host many **First Day Hikes** on New Year's Day. **Candlelight Hikes** are a popular event in the chill of winter, too.

If you've yet to see Mama Rosa, the giant troll sculpture in Wauwatosa, you'll want to check out **Spotlight On Firefly Grove Park**. The spotlight park for this issue, it is a new park in Wauwatosa that is perfect for kids, grown-ups, and art enthusiasts alike.

Just when you're starting to get bored, **February** happenings has a short list of winter festivals in town, and at Havenswoods State Forest. Consider a Valentine's Day walk in a park or preserve, in search of hearts found in nature.

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Milwaukee Holiday Lights Festival - The Highlights Of The Season

Downtown Milwaukee shines again as it celebrates the holiday season this year. Twinkling lights and sculptures aglow with seasonal cheer are available to all at Cathedral Square Park, Pere Marquette Park, and Zeidler Union Square. The festival begins November 20, and runs through January 1, 2026.

You can walk or drive-thru to experience the festive displays of over 500,000 lights as animated sculptures, interactive displays, and twinkling street decorations boost your holiday mood. Or purchase tickets in advance and grab a ride on the Jingle Bus for a 40-minute tour of all the lights and sights Thursday through Sunday nights. Tickets for the Jingle Bus are \$5 per person, and must be purchased in advance.



The Ornament Trail is back this year, which includes 15 larger than life artful adornments along Wisconsin Avenue, select locations on Water Street, and in the Third Ward. Businesses along the route will offer specials throughout the season, as well.

Check out the seasonal brochure for a wide array of festive events and activities for revelers of all ages. For a complete listing of events, pricing, and other details, you can download the festival brochure [here](#).

Frosty Free Week at the Milwaukee County Zoo

Keep the fun going after Christmas, and up until New Year's with a visit to the Milwaukee County Zoo.

The Zoo offers a week of free daytime admission to thank guests for their support. Visit the Zoo during **"Frosty Free Week"** to enjoy animals and nature.

All guests receive free daytime admission **December 26-30, 2025**. (Regular parking and attraction rates apply. Regular admission rates apply to the Zoo's Wild Lights night event.)

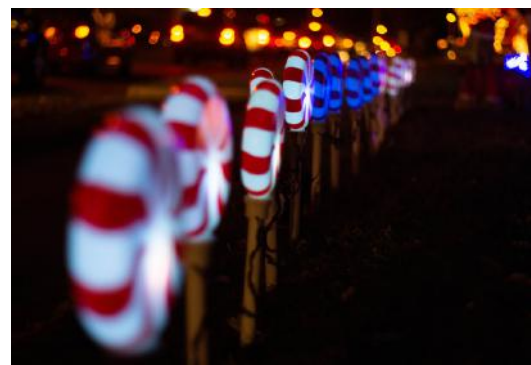


Candy Cane Lane - West Allis

This annual event of neighborhood light displays takes donations for the MACC Fund, for the fight against childhood cancer.

These festive displays, all created by community residents, will cheer you and yours. The neighborhood parameters are: 96th Street to 92nd Street, from Montana Avenue to Oklahoma Avenue.

Drive or walk through this holiday season, the event runs **through December 25**. See their [website](#) for specific hours and more detail.





Holiday Light Show - Rotary Botanical Gardens, Janesville

Back for the 29th year, this brilliant holiday event is held on the grounds of the Janesville Rotary Gardens. Themed light displays, animations, and twinkling walkways will lift your holiday spirits with over two-million holiday lights.

We attended this event a few years back, and it was well worth the drive to Janesville. However, it's a very well attended event. *Tickets must be purchased/reserved in advance.* Tickets are purchased online. Tickets prices: Free for 2 and under. \$5 for children 3-12, \$15 for those 13 and up.

Dates: Dec 5-7, 11-23, 26-30, Jan 2-3

Evenings: 4:30pm to 9pm. (Last admission at 8:30pm, lights go dark at 9pm)
Reservations/Tickets required purchase online in advance.

Beaver Dam Rotary Lights - Swan City Park, Beaver Dam

This charming holiday light display marks the 9th year of cheer sponsored by the Rotary Club of Beaver Dam. The park square, located in the heart of Beaver Dam, features walkways of Christmas trees decorated with seasonal flair by local businesses and organizations. The bandshell has an orchestra of lit trees accompanied by holiday music.

Lights go on at 4:45pm each day, and remain lit until midnight. Plenty of time to take a stroll through solo, or with friends and family in tow. Admission is free, however, donations are being accepted to raise funds for restoration of the Historic Springhouse structure in the park.

The event runs **through January 3, 2025**

Parking spots are located along the street surrounding the square.



Garden Of Lights - Green Bay Botanical Garden

Experience the season where nature shines bright at **Garden of Lights** presented by Wisconsin Public Service Foundation— a 1-mile path filled with luminous lightscapes, sparkling outdoor scenes, and endless magical moments at Green Bay Botanical Garden.

Discover two exciting displays: interactive Tic Tac Snow game and the Aurora in Bloom laser show. Enjoy extra sparkle with themed evenings full of festive fun for everyone!

December 18-23 & 26-30 4:30-9 pm

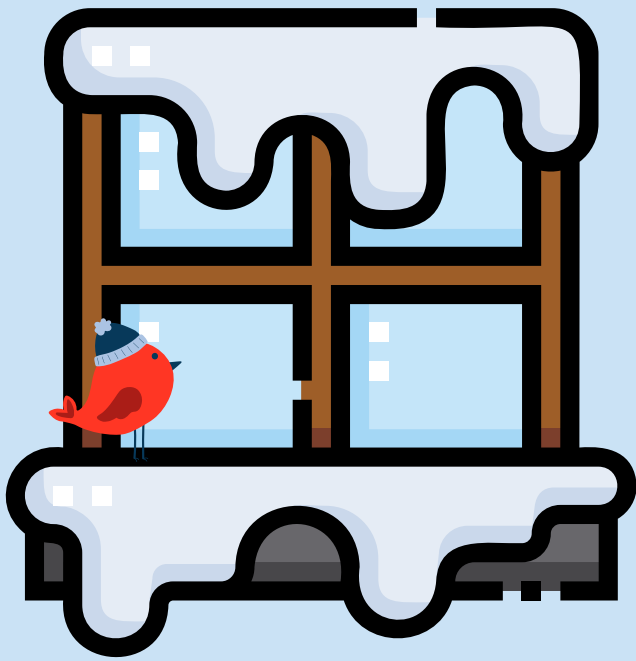
Doors open at 4:30 pm. Last entry at 8:30 pm. Lights out at 9 pm.

Limited Wagon Ride tickets are available every event night.

Parking is free and available on site on a first-come, first-served basis. Overflow parking is located across and down the street within walking distance. No shuttles available.

Ticket prices vary by date. (See calendar for specific times and pricing)





CUDDLE UP WITH A COZY WINTER READ



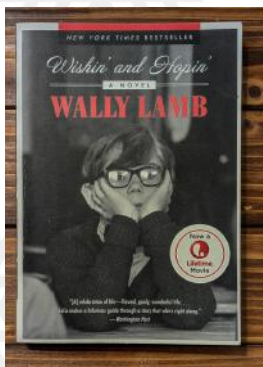
Surviving the hectic holiday season requires giving yourself time to take a breath. Pick up a festive romance, or a cozy mystery and take some time to mentally escape. Beyond the holidays, as winter drags on, what better time to disappear into the pages of a new or favorite book. If you're in the mood to pick up a new (or used) title, here are some to consider. Settle in and savor the opportunity.

The Afterlife of Holly Chase - by Cynthia Hand

On Christmas Eve five years ago, Holly was visited by three ghosts who showed her how selfish and spoiled she was. They tried to convince her to mend her ways. She didn't. And then she died. Now she's stuck working for the top-secret company Project Scrooge. As the latest Ghost of Christmas Past.

This young-adult novel is a good bit of fun. A very modern take on an old Christmas tale. I highly recommend it for teens and adults alike.

Published by Harper Teen, 2017



Wishin' and Hopin' - by Wally Lamb

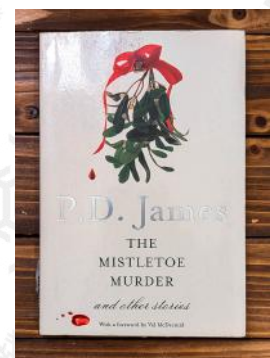
If you're a fan of writer Wally Lamb, you're in for something a little different. This bit of nostalgia will take you back to Christmastime in the 60's. It's a story told from the perspective of 10-year-old Felix Funicello. Cousin to the infamous Annette Funicello, of Mickey Mouse Club fame, and more. Felix is trying to navigate fifth grade, understand the facts of life, deal with school bullies, a mother on a quest to win a baking contest, and a whole lot of life lessons.

Published by HarperCollins, 2010

The Mistletoe Murder and other stories - by P.D. James

Four short murder mysteries set during the winter holiday season. If you enjoy a whodunit, and a quick read, this collection should be quite satisfying. It was my first P.D. James book, and great introduction to this infamous author.

Two stories feature a young Adam Dalgliesh, an English police detective made popular in several of P.D. James other works, and in subsequent television series as well.





Christmas At The Vinyl Cafe - by Stuart McLean



Published by
Penguin Canada
2019

If you're not familiar with the Vinyl Cafe, the Christmas season is a good time to check it out. The Vinyl Cafe is a Canadian variety/radio show, starring, and written by, Stuart McLean. The series was in production until 2015. Unfortunately, Stuart McLean passed away in 2017. Those who loved and worked with him have made a point to share his performances with a podcast that features memories and some of the best spoken story performances by Stuart. The podcast is called [Backstage At The Vinyl Cafe](#).

My introduction came several years ago with a mixed holiday CD that included "Polly Anderson's Christmas Party". I have made a point to listen to it every year since. And I've purchased several of Stuart's books, one of which is *Christmas At The Vinyl Cafe*. There's plenty of humor and heart in these stories that detail the day to day lives of Dave, a small record store owner, and his family and friends in the Toronto area. They are fun to read any time of year.

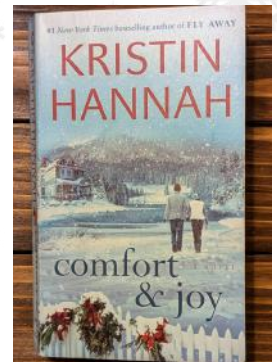
You can find many of Stuart's performances on YouTube as well, including ["Polly Anderson's Christmas Party"](#).

Comfort & Joy - by Kristin Hannah

Kristin Hannah is a bestselling author, with a bookshelf of titles to her credit. I picked up "Comfort & Joy" at a used bookstore a few years back. First published in 2005, it precedes many of her most popular novels.

The story begins as Joy, a newly divorced school librarian, is venturing into her first Christmas post-split with her husband. She makes a last-minute decision to take a holiday vacation, and boards a chartered flight to her destination. The plane crashes, and Joy survives. At least it seems so.

As a holiday romance of sorts, it's a unique one. There are some interesting twists and turns, along with Kristin Hannah's well crafted writing. I enjoyed it.



Published by
Random House
Publishing Group
2006

The Winter Sister - by Megan Collins

In the depths of winter, Sylvie's older sister, Persephone goes missing. And then is found murdered. An investigation ensues, but no killer is found. Sylvie's mother turns inward from grief, and the relationship between her and Sylvie becomes distanced.

Sixteen years later, Sylvie returns home to help care for her mother as she goes through chemotherapy. Back in the house she grew up in for the first time in many years, Sylvie cannot help but dig into her sister's murder. But what secrets will she unearth? She's about to find out.



Published by
Atria Books
2019

Suspenseful and gripping, you'll be hard-pressed to put it down.

Share The Gift Of The Outdoors

If you're looking for a last-minute holiday gift, annual state, county, and national park passes/stickers are a gift that keeps on giving all year long. Many are conveniently available to purchase online. They may even have special combo packages available during the holiday season as well.

Wisconsin State, County, & National Park Stickers:

[Wisconsin State Park Sticker](#)
[Waukesha County Parks Sticker](#)
[Washington County Parks Sticker](#)
[Marinette County Parks Sticker](#)
[A National Park Sticker](#)



A snowy scene at Paradise Springs Nature Trail,
Kettle Moraine State Forest, Eagle, WI

Nature Center Memberships:

[Schlitz Audubon Nature Center](#)
[Wehr Nature Center](#)
[Boerner Botanical Gardens](#)
[River Bend Nature Center](#)
[Riveredge Nature Center](#)
[Retzer Nature Center](#)
[Urban Ecology Center](#)
[Pringle Nature Center](#)
[Maywood Environmental Park](#)

Tip: Most nature centers have great gift shops. Opt outside at a nature center for some exploration, then do a little holiday season shopping in their gift shops!

Want to gift to someone not in the Milwaukee area? Check out this resource for [Nature Centers Across Wisconsin](#)



Bits & Pieces

Enjoy more seasonal ideas with our online special features and blog.



Winter In Wisconsin



Gift Ideas For The Nature Lover



Holiday Ornaments For The Birds

Let's Go Sledding!



Winter has arrived, so bring on the snow! What a great opportunity to get outside for some seasonal fun. No matter where you live, there's bound to be a park near you with a sledding hill. Our local neighborhood, county, and state parks offer a range of sledding hills to add some adventure to your winter days. Bundle up, head out with family and friends, and enjoy!

Milwaukee & Waukesha Counties

Daylight Hours Only

Brown Deer Park - 7835 N. Green Bay Ave, Milwaukee

Firefly Grove Park - 1900 N. 116th St., Wauwatosa

Greene Park - 4235 S. Lipton Ave, St Francis

Hales Corners Park - 5765 S. New Berlin Rd, Hales Corners

Indigenous Peoples Park - 7301 W Courtland Ave, Milwaukee

Kletzch Park - 6560 N. Milwaukee River Parkway, Glendale

LaFollette Park - 9418 W. Washington St, West Allis

McCarty Park - 8214 W. Cleveland Ave, West Allis

McGovern Park - 5400 N. 51 Blvd, Milwaukee

Wilson Park - 1601 W Howard Ave, Milwaukee

Calhoun Park - 5400 S. Calhoun Rd, New Berlin

Valley View Park - 5051 S Sunny Slope Rd, New Berlin

Wirth Park/Wirth Park South - 2585 Pilgrim Rd, Brookfield

Lisbon Community Park - N78W26970 Bartlett Parkway, Hartland

Lowell Park - 2201 Michigan Ave, Waukesha

Minooka Park - 1927 E Sunset Drive, Waukesha

Parks With Lighting for Sledding After Dark

(4:30pm - 8:30pm)

Currie Park - 3535 N Mayfair Rd, Wauwatosa

Humboldt Park - 3000 S. Howell Ave, Milwaukee

Park Arthur - S63W17833 College Ave, Muskego

Pulaski Park - 2677 S. 16th St, Milwaukee

Whitnall Park - 5879 S. 92 St, Franklin



Washington County

Glacier Hills County Park - 1664 Friess Lake Rd., Hubertus

Ridge Run Park - 300 S. University Dr., West Bend

Homestead Hollow County Park - N120W19809 Freistadt Rd., Village of Germantown

Ozaukee County

Mee-Kwon Park - 6333 W. Bonniwell Rd. 136 N., Mequon

Centennial Park - W68 N851 Evergreen Boulevard, Cedarburg

Fischer Park - N70W6110 Bridge Road, Cedarburg

Hawthorne Hills County Park - 4720 Cty Hwy I, Saukville

Sheboygan County

Vollrath Park - 2001 N. 3rd Street, Sheboygan

Kiwanis Park - 726 Kiwanis Park Road, Sheboygan

Manitowoc County

Silver Creek Park - 3001 S. 10th St., Manitowoc

Door County

Big Hill Park (Georgia St. Hill) - N. 9th Ave., Sturgeon Bay

Big Hill Park Incinerator Hill - N. 9th Ave., Sturgeon Bay

Hill 17, Peninsula State Park - 9462 Shore Rd., Fish Creek

Sister Bay Sledding Hill - 2155 Autumn Ct., Sister Bay

Brown County

Kewaunee Winter Park - N3787 Ransom Moore Ln., Kewaunee

Triangle Sports Area - 500 Beverly Rd., Green Bay

Neshota Park - 5757 Park Road, Denmark

Racine County

Crawford Park - 5199 Chester Ln., Caledonia

Steinhoff Park - 833 Cedar Drive, Burlington

Kenosha County

Alford Park & Beach - 2201 Alford Park Dr., Kenosha

Fox River Park - 9521 304th Ave., Burlington

Petrifying Springs Park - 5555 7th St., Kenosha

Washington Park - 1901 Washington Rd., Kenosha

Rock County

Riverside Park - Edgehill Dr., Janesville

Rock River Heritage County Park - 5801 N. River Rd., Janesville

Hospital Hill Snow Sledding - 623 Olympian Blvd., Beloit

Rockport Park - 2801 Rockport Rd., Janesville

State Parks

Richard Bong State Recreation Area

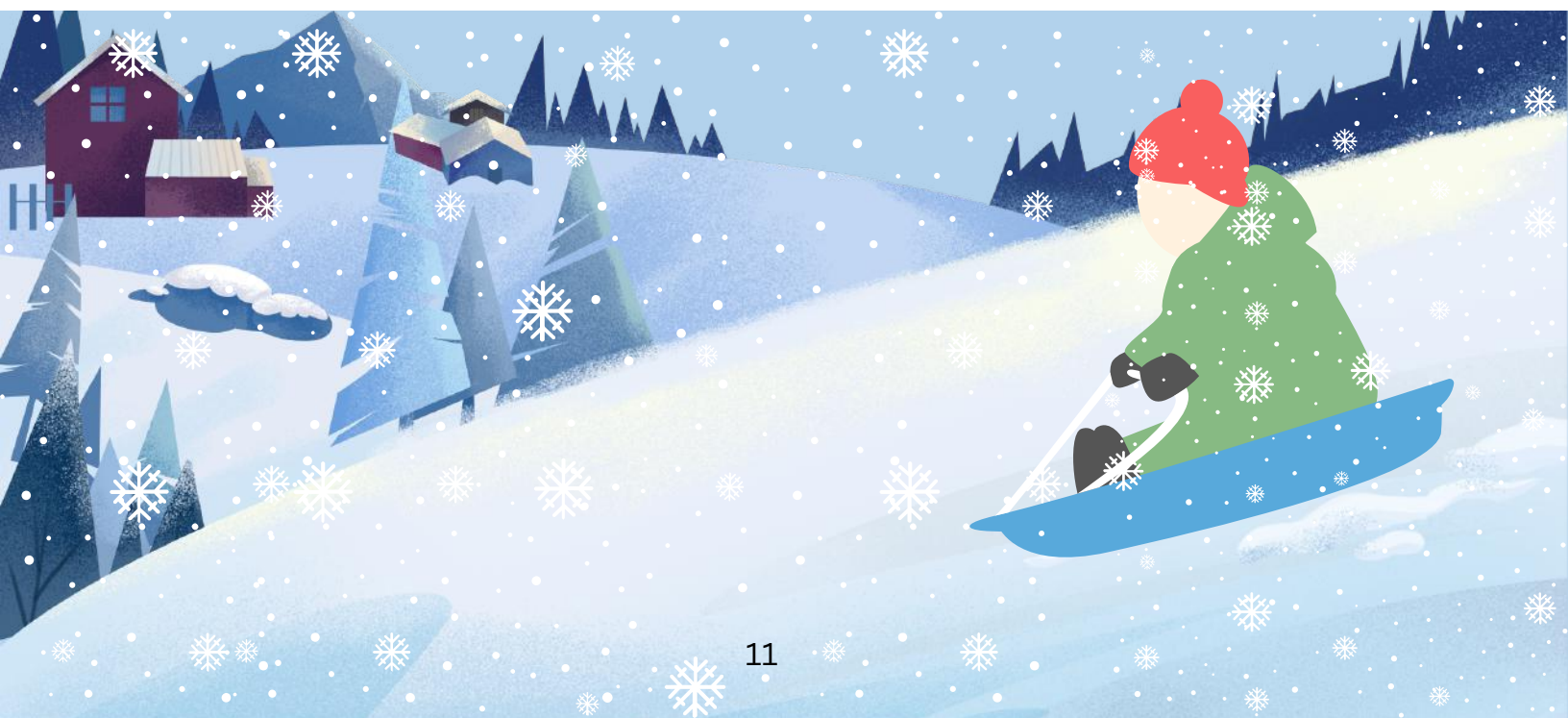
Kettle Moraine Forest - Northern and Southern Unit

Governor Dodge State Park

Lake Kegonsa State Park

Governor Thompson State Park

Governor Earl Peshtigo River State Park





Midwinter Beauty

December 21st. Winter Solstice. Midwinter. The shortest day of the year. The longest night. The first day of winter. No matter how you define it, it is here. A reminder that as sure as we descend into the darkness of the frostiest season, we will, eventually, welcome light. The difference will be slight at first, but as the days, weeks, and months go on, daylight will hang on longer. The balance between dark and light shifting once more.

Nature often reflects the best in us. The worst in us, too. As a human race, we live striving for balance. Forever teetering between awe and destruction. Just the existence of the human race wears on this planet called earth. But, like any other living creature, we do exist, and we deserve to continue doing so.

The beauty of this planet, from the mundane to the glorious, imprints on us throughout the seasons and our lifetimes. Even on our most difficult days, the wonder of nature exists, surrounds us, in a myriad of ways.



A red-breasted nuthatch,
an occasional winter visitor.

Shaken by sorrow or worry, we may not be fully aware of the wild world around us. But if we step outside, or simply spend a few moments gazing out a window, chances are there will be something of nature in front of us. And a connection we share.

Even on busy city streets lined with buildings of concrete and stone, birds take flight. Insects tunnel. Seeds bust open and rise up through the sidewalk cracks.

While I have experienced some of the most beautiful natural spaces in the United States, I continue to find myself drawn to the bits of wilderness within the cities and suburbs. As a city dweller, I am constantly amazed by the beauty of urban wild spaces and wildlife around me.

Observing the natural world during moments of my daily life makes an impression. Memories of significant moments in life, good or bad, are often accompanied by recollections of the sounds of birds singing, or leaves rustling on trees in the breeze. Was the sun shining, was it raining, or snow-covered and shivering cold?

These sights, sounds, and sensations are not just fodder for a good tale. They are the realities of life we can all relate to.

These are real and true things we share. No matter who we are.



A tiny red squirrel in Kinsey Park,
harvesting a black walnut for winter.



The Greenfield Park lagoon dressed in frost and snow.

I don't have much opportunity to travel far at this point in my life, though the desire is there. But for now, appreciating nearby nature is my priority. And my pleasure. It helps me to understand that our local green spaces serve great purpose.

To me, to my community, to the wildlife community that depends on it. These spaces are just as important as state and national parks. We depend on them. And, in kind, they depend on us, too.



Woodpeckers like the northern flicker are welcome backyard visitors.



A winter visit to the Lake Michigan shore will reward you with sightings of ducks and shorebirds.



Mystery tracks in freshly fallen snow.



Juncos, a popular backyard winter bird, enjoy searching for seeds on the ground and in snow.





At This Moment

I turned 62 this year. Some days I feel every bit of it. Some days I feel like I'm just getting started. It's bewildering at times to look back. To consider all that has changed during my lifetime. My 88-year old mother-in law and I often marvel at the changes she has seen in her lifetime as well. Far more than I have. We look back with nostalgia, humor, longing, and affection. And grief. Too much grief.

At a time of year heralded as a season of joy, it's hard not to reflect with some sadness on those no longer with us. The human condition makes us vulnerable to loss. And the holiday season tends to amplify those losses. I miss my mother every day, but the holidays shine a brighter light on her absence. In the past year I have lost my oldest sister, a dear family friend, a beloved cousin, and a precious pet. Headed towards the end of another calendar year, it's natural to reflect. A year ago I had no idea all of these tragedies would take place. But they did. And here we are.

Even if you are not one to celebrate the holiday season, the advent of winter and the coming new year can stir up a world of feelings. Anxiety, sadness, regret, longing, grief. If you have lost someone in your life, parent, spouse, child, friend, or pet, it can be a challenge not to despair. But take heart, you are not alone. And it's okay to struggle. Especially during the holiday and winter season.

Do your best to give yourself some room to breathe. To reflect on good memories. To talk with someone you trust. To share. Be good to yourself. It's okay to cry. It's also okay to enjoy the celebration. To spend time with people you love. Or to escape into a good book, movie, or favorite music. To nap. Yes, naps are good.

Bundle up and take a walk in one of your favorite parks, or on a favorite trail. Inhale the briskness of the winter air and exhale. Then do it again. Listen for birds flying by, the squeak of packed snow beneath your feet. Look up, examine the beauty of bare trees against a gray winter sky. Note the vividness of red berries perched on open branches of a leafless shrub. Consider the quiet. The beat of your heart.

You are here, At this moment. Alive. And though your loved one may not be here with you, they are not forgotten. They are still loved and held so very close. In your memories, in your being. Forever.

Wishing you peace, at this moment.



It's a new year, but skip the resolutions. Instead, take advantage of some of the local nature-oriented events and get outside, or be inspired by nature inside. From winter festivals, free winter fishing days, and bald eagle watching, to ice skating, bird watching hikes, and a variety of art classes, there's plenty to inspire this January.



Winterfest 2026 - Boerner Botanical Gardens

Sunday, January 18, 2026, 10am-2pm – **Free Event!**

Cure your Winter blues and visit Boerner Botanical Gardens for **FREE** guided winter walks, kids indoor crafts & activities, activities with *Wehr Nature Center* and more!

Winter walks last about 45 minutes in length and begin at 11:00 and 12:30pm.

2026 Winter Free Fishing Weekend Opens Doors to the Outdoors: January 17-18

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is hosting its annual Winter Free Fishing Weekend Jan. 17-18, 2026 to share the fun and excitement of winter fishing.

Winter Free Fishing Weekend gives families, friends and newcomers an opportunity give fishing a try or introduce another to the sport.

Fishing offers more than just a chance to hook a fish – it is a great way to connect with nature, share time with loved ones, learn about Wisconsin's aquatic resources and put some delicious food on your table.

During Winter Free Fishing Weekend, residents and non-residents may fish most state waters without purchasing a fishing license, trout stamp or salmon stamp (see exceptions regarding trout waters).

All other 2025-2026 Hook and Line regulations including bag limits, size limits and species restrictions remain in effect. Regulations are available online.

Need Help Finding A Spot To Fish?

The new Wisconsin Fish Finder is a one-stop shop for fishing regulations, launch locations and access points, stocking information and more.





Bald Eagle Watching Days - Sauk City

January 17 & 18, 2026

Experience the thrill of watching Bald Eagles soar and fish over the Upper Wisconsin River. This annual winter event includes eagle viewing: Saturday, Jan 17: 8am - 4pm Sunday, Jan 18: 8am - 2pm.

Other events include: live birds of prey presentations, bus tours, kids activities, and a museum presentation.

Note: All shows and bus tours are FREE, but do require a ticket. Check out Ferry Bluff Eagle Council [website](#) for more info.

41st Waukesha Janboree Winter Festival **January 16-25, 2026**

A festive and family friendly event, the Waukesha Janboree offers plenty of fun for all. Enjoy a cheerful stroll along the Walk of Lights along the riverfront in downtown Waukesha.

Bring your ice skates, or rent a pair, and enjoy skating under the glow of beautiful lights at Eble Arena.

Other offerings include a scavenger hunt, tyke hikes, family painting events, cookie decorating and more!



Explore Your Inner Artist with a January workshop or two at Sharon Lynne Wilson Center For the Arts

The Sharon Lynne Wilson Center for the Arts offers an on-going roster of classes in a wide selection of interests.

This January you can explore your inner painter, sketch artist, photographer, or jewelry maker with a variety of single and multiple session classes.

Whether a dabbler, beginner, or an experienced artist, there's plenty of inspiration to brighten your winter days.

Registration is required. See their [website](#) for more details.

Havenwoods State Forest - Second Saturday Bird Walk **Saturday, January 10, 2026 8:30am-10:30am**

Enjoy an informal guided birding walk for all ages. Spotting and identifying birds as we go. Mostly flat terrain with less than 1 mile of hiking.

Dress for the weather and bring your binoculars or borrow a pair at the Nature Center. No prior experience in birding is necessary. New birders and families welcome!

This event will be held rain or shine.

Event Location: Havenwoods State Forest, 6141 N. Hopkins St., Milwaukee, WI 53209





First Day Hikes In Wisconsin State Parks

Start **2026** off right with a hike in one of Wisconsin’s beautiful state parks or nature areas. There are a dozen scheduled **New Year’s Day** hikes across the state. Some are guided hikes, some self-guided. Many of them offer a bonfire and warm beverages at the finish. It’s a festive way to start off the new year, and a warm way to cap off a hike in the winter chill. Click the links for more details.

[Harrington Beach State park](#)
[12pm - 2pm](#)

[Havenwoods State Forest](#)
[10am - 11am](#)

[Devil’s Lake State Park](#)
[3:30pm - 5:30pm](#)

[Richard Bong State Recreation Area](#)
[1pm - 3pm](#)

[Kettle Moraine State Forest Pike Lake Unit](#)
[12pm - 2pm](#)

[Straight Lake State Park](#)
[1pm - 3pm](#)

[Newport State Park](#)
[1pm - 4pm](#)

[Copper Falls State Park](#)
[1pm - 4pm](#)

[Interstate State Park](#)
[1pm - 3pm](#)

[Buckhorn State Park](#)
[1pm - 2:30pm](#)

[Roche-A-Cri State Park](#)
[1pm - 2:30pm](#)

[High Cliff State Park](#)
[10am - 3pm](#)



Candlelight & Chill

The darkness of winter can feel relentless. Thankfully, many Wisconsin preserves and state parks offer candlelight hikes during the winter months. The perfect occasion to venture out with friends and family to enjoy a brisk evening hike along trails warmed by the glow of candlelight. Most followed by campfires and hot chocolate. Check out the links below to find one near you.

Havenwoods State Forest

Candlelight Hike

February 14, 2026 4pm - 7pm

Wildcat Mountain State Park

Hike, Ski and Snowshoe

January 10, 2026 5pm - 7pm

Newport State Park

Ski, Hike and Snowshoe

February 14, 2026 5:30 - 8pm

Kettle Moraine State Forest

Southern Unit

Candlelight Hike & Ski

January 17, 2026 5:00pm - 8:00 pm

Horicon Marsh Visitor Center

Horicon Marsh

January 17, 2026 5pm - 9pm

Lac Lawrann Conservancy

West Bend

Jan 17, 2026 5pm - 7pm

Riveredge Nature Center

Trails Aglow: Riveredge Birthday Party

Luminary Light Hike & Celebration

January 16, 2026 4:30pm - 8pm

Woodland Dunes Nature Center

& Preserve

Candlelight Night

February 7, 2026 6pm - 8pm

Castle Creek Conservancy

Candlelight Hike

Valentine's Day Edition

February 14, 2026 6pm - 8pm

Retzer Nature Center

Wild Winter Night Candlelight Hike

February 13, 2026 6pm - 8pm



Firefly Grove Park is a new multi-use park that opened in Wauwatosa in May of 2025. One of the most notable features in the park is an original Thomas Dambo troll statue - Mama Rosa. She has stopped to smell the flowers (lampposts) in the park, and greets visitors just a minute or two from the main park entrance off of 116th Street.



The park features a wide array of family-friendly features: paved walking trails (wheelchair accessible), a bicycle pump track, an open-air pavilion with picnic benches, a unique children's play area, swings that accommodate adults and children, a sledding hill, natural play spaces, and plenty of park benches, including several artful benches designed by artists near and far.





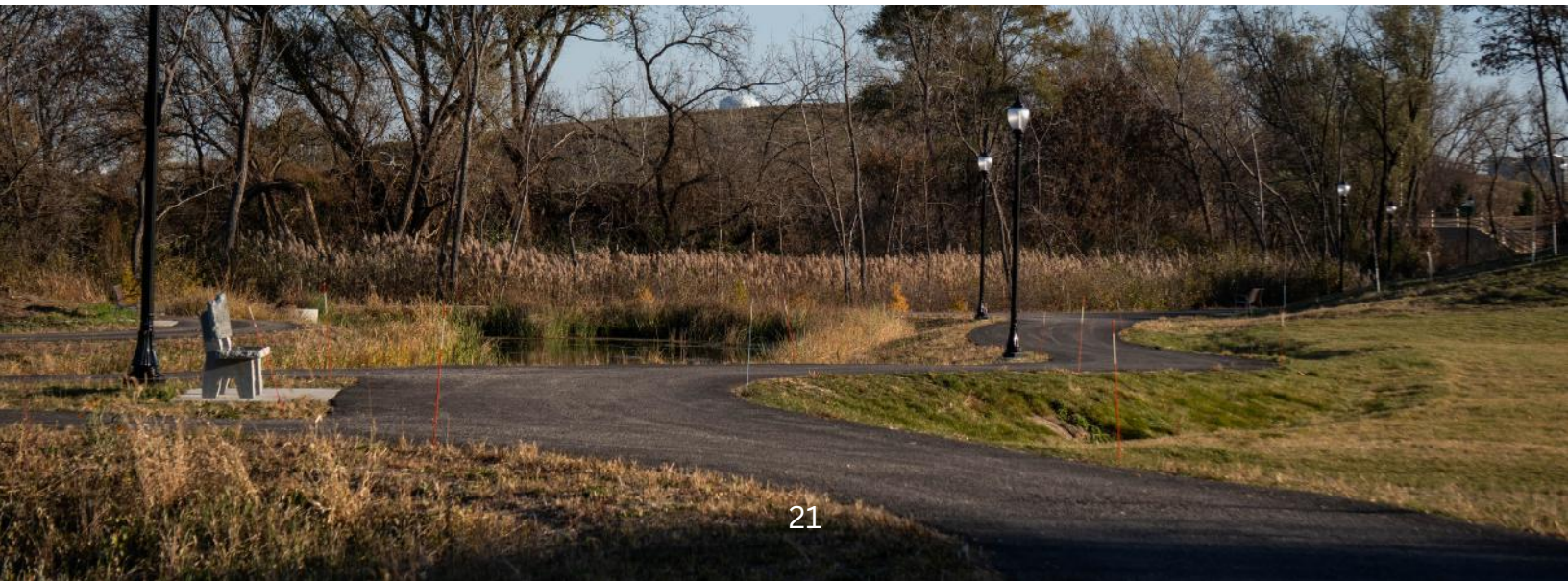
Naturally sustainable features include native plants and trees, stormwater management, a rain garden, and a solar array that collects power to supply the nearby police station. The park is wildlife friendly, providing food, water, and nearby shelter for birds, deer, ducks, and other urban wildlife.



Hours: Open daily
Restrooms on site (closed in winter)

Dogs are permitted on-leash, and must be picked up after.

Location: 1900 N. 116th Street, Wauwatosa





We've made it through January, always a long month, if you ask me. Reward yourself by enjoying some of the local festivals, a walk in our state parks, or just take a walk in your favorite park, on your own, or with friends and family. Look for hearts in nature in honor of Valentine's Day. You'll be amazed at what you find.



Cedarburg Winter Festival - February 21-22, 2026

Bundle up and head to Cedarburg for the annual Winter Festival. There will be fun for all with a schedule of activities, food and drink, an indoor marketplace, bed races, ice sculpture carving, a dog sled pull, and more.

Local downtown Cedarburg boutiques and restaurants will be joining in the festival fun.

Admission is FREE. Check out their [website](#) for details.

Mittenfest 2026 - Bayview

Burnhearts Mitten Fest, Milwaukee's favorite winter celebration for over a decade, is returning to its original home outside Burnhearts in Bay View - 2599 S Logan Ave.

Saturday, February 7, 2026. From noon to 8 p.m.

The annual block party will feature live music, craft beer, cocktails, and delicious offerings from local food vendors.

Milwaukee Record, a proud media sponsor alongside WMSE, will unveil the exciting and diverse musical lineup for this year's event. Details to come soon.



Winter Break Festival - Havenwoods State Forest

Saturday, February 28, 2026 12pm-4pm

Winter Break invites you out of hibernation with a free festival for all ages, experience levels, bodies, and genders. We offer activities that are gentle, fun, and surprising.

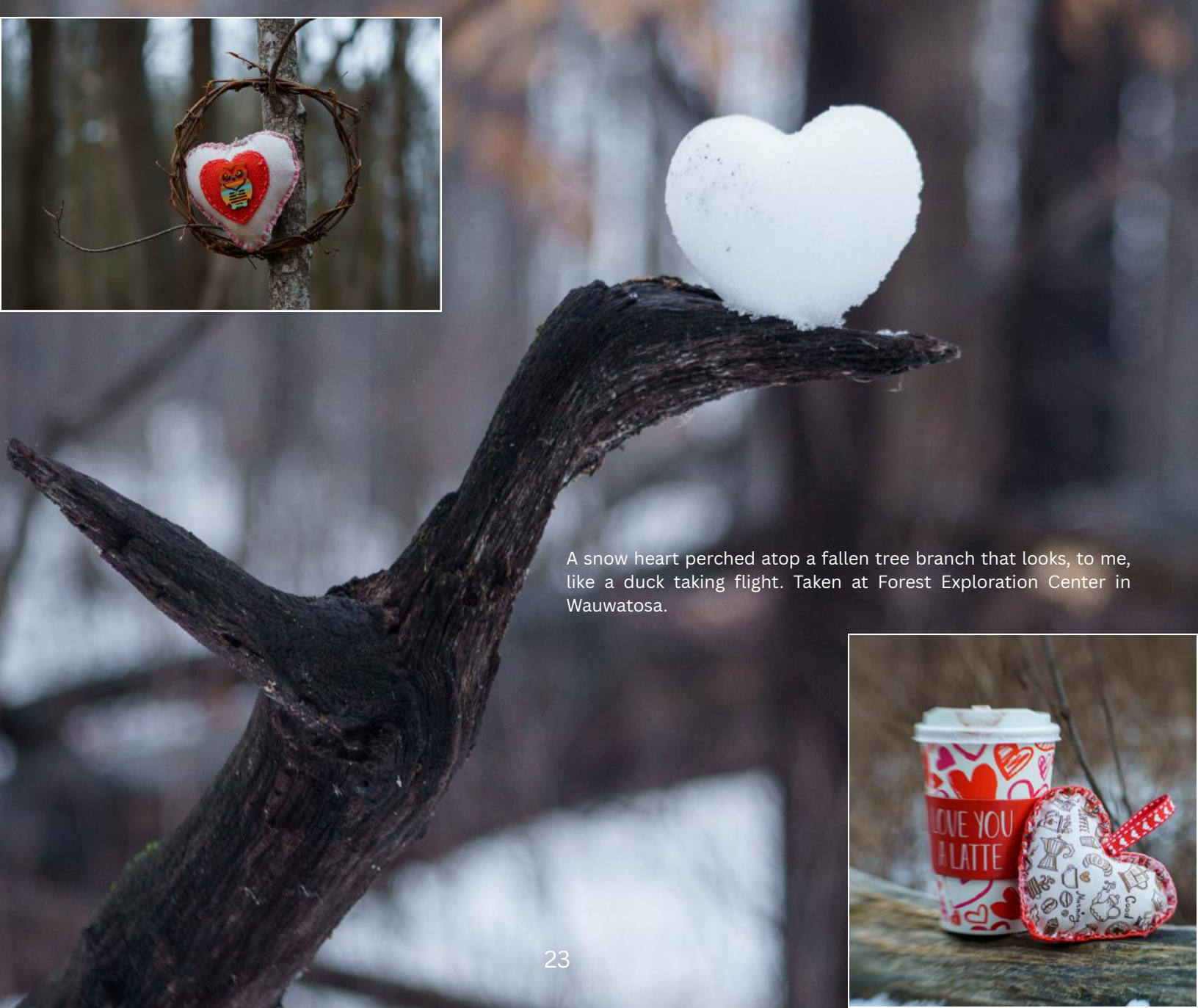
This event flexes with the weather. The forecast doesn't need to look golden. If we have cold, snow, and ice, that just unlocks more activities! Event is FREE, [reservations required](#).



For The Love Of Winter

Valentine's Day is a perfect day to get outside and take a walk in nature. Take a friend or loved one along, and be on the lookout for naturally occurring hearts along the way.

Want to add some of your own fun? Bring along a homemade valentine or two and photograph them on the trail. From paper hearts to molded snow hearts, let your inner artist shine (and be sure to take any non-natural items back home with you).



A snow heart perched atop a fallen tree branch that looks, to me, like a duck taking flight. Taken at Forest Exploration Center in Wauwatosa.



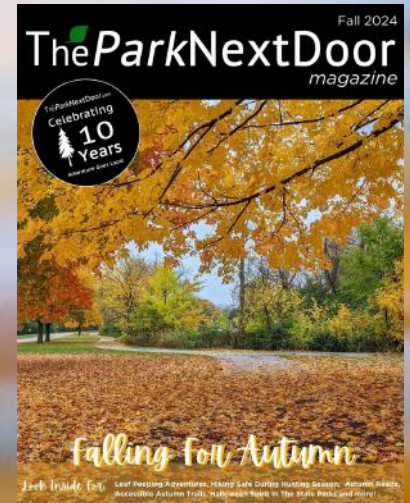
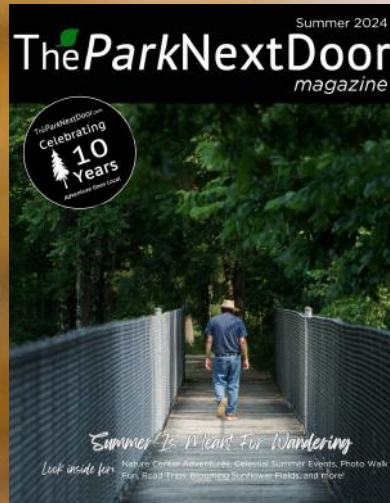


Exploring the local parks, state parks, nature areas,
and other bits of wilderness in Wisconsin.

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TheParkNextDoor

magazine



ART FOR YOUR WALLS FROM THE PARK NEXT DOOR

If you're a Wisconsin nature fan, you can decorate your walls, phone case, home decor, or stationery with images from the parks, nature preserves, and trails of Wisconsin featured on The Park Next Door.

Fine Art America is the world's largest art marketplace and print-on-demand technology company.

They have been helping artists sell wall art, home decor, apparel, and other products since 2006, and are home to hundreds of thousands of artists, photographers, graphic designers, illustrators, and iconic brands.



Want to support local artists in your area? They have a search feature to do just that! You can visit my online shop to see the current offering of images and custom products.

You can find my shop at: <https://1-kimberly-mackowski.pixels.com/>

Simple Ways To Support The Park Next Door And It's Purpose

Sign up for the website newsletter. I generally send out one email per month. Occasionally, if there is something special to share, I may send another, or send it a little earlier than usual if content warrants it. I know how overwhelming a full inbox can be. [Sign up here.](#)

Feel free to **forward/share** the monthly emails with like-minded friends and nature enthusiasts. And remember, if you do subscribe, to open the emails. If they don't show as open, eventually the service suspends the email address.

Share your discoveries. If you've visited a local park or preserve that isn't yet on the website, let me know. I'd love the opportunity to check it out, and share it, too.

Share a favorite feature, blog, or location listing. If a specific feature page, blog, or location tickles your fancy, please share it with friends, or on your social media feed. Every little bit of exposure helps.

Follow The Park Next Door on Instagram for updates on everyday explorations and happenings. [@theparknextdoor](#)



Thank You for your support,
and for your love of our parks and preserves.



*Freshly fallen snow sparkles
While underneath the flowers sleep*