

Vol. 2 Issue 2 • Spring 2025

The Rattlesnake Buzz

Allamakee County Conservation Board Newsletter



Do you know this
plant?
Check out page 8 for
details!

This issue:

Spring Has Arrived!
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Information

Check out our website
[Allamakee County Conservation](#)
and stay up to date on our
[Facebook Page](#) for all of the
upcoming events!

Spring Has Arrived!

by Ross Geerdes, Director

For me, most Saturday mornings start as the dawn is beginning to break over the eastern sky I brew a cup of coffee and take a sip or two as I get dressed to go out the door. I head east along my gravel road that is rarely travelled by others, especially early in the morning as the sun is beginning to rise. I walk to the east, past my neighbors house which is surround by woods, struggle up the first big hill followed by a steep, but short decline down the next. It is here about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile from my house that I turn to the North, paralleling the Mississippi River perched high above on the edge of the bluff.



Continued

For now, I can see the ice-covered backwaters with white drifts of snow that are shrinking by the day for the leaves have not burst out yet. On these early mornings in the first few weeks of March with the last of the winter chill still holding on I notice the arrival with all my senses, but only one marks Spring.

A bright red male cardinal gives away his position with a call of Cheerie, Cheerie, Cheerie. His call is amplified and cheerful as he can feel the joy of spring, the end of the long hard winter. Being the nature nerd I am I cannot help but call back, the best that I can trying to fool the cardinal. Often times he will call back and even follow along from tree to tree as I walk down the middle of the road. Soon enough he will know I am not another cardinal, but nevertheless his call is a sign of Spring. But for me Spring has not yet arrived.



As my walk continues the wind begins to bring the smell of fresh pine. A huge stand of white pines bumps to the edge of the gravel road, the branches are often drooping low enough that passing vehicles have to move to the opposite side of the road. But for me while I am walking I move to the same side of the road and I reach up to touch the soft bundles of 5 needles with my now gloveless hand. I catch a flash in the trees and quickly see a Barred Owl fly from the edge of the pines deeper into the woods where it will perch and spend its day resting waiting for nightfall to come again. The owl can tell that spring is near with an increase in activity and flutter in his flight. But for me Spring has not yet arrived.





Continued

On the edge of the road I can see yet another sure sign of Spring. The day before as the afternoon sun warmed the road it became just soft enough to leave a track. A track that may last for several weeks, until the first warm rain of the season washes it away. The track is a familiar track and only different in size. Tom turkeys walked this route yesterday, exiting the field where they gobbled up the first larvae of the year emerging into insects. They are headed to the forest to roost or possibly gathering rocks for their gizzards to help digest the tasty insects that they have just eaten. The turkeys have disbanded their large winter groups and are in smaller groups now, maybe 3 or 4 or 5 at most. But for me Spring has not yet arrived.

It is on my way back home as I retrace my steps before I make the big turn to the west that Spring arrives. At first it is far off, but it continues to get closer and closer but still out of sight. In fact, for me, the first sign of spring may remain out of sight but I can hear it and I know spring is here. Aldo Leopold described the sounds of approaching sandhill cranes, to me the beginning of Spring, as the “tinkling of little bells, the baying of some sweet-throated hound, and a pandemonium of trumpets, rattles, croaks, and cries.” For me Spring has arrived.





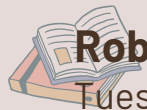
Upcoming Events

Follow us on Facebook for more information and to stay up to date on all of our upcoming events.

March

Conservation Board Meeting

Tuesday, 4th @ 1 PM - Driftless Area Education & Visitors Center



Robey Library Storytime

Tuesday, 11th @ 10:30 AM -
Robey Library - 701 1st Ave.
NW., Waukon, IA



New Albin Public Library

Thursday, 13th @ 3:30 PM -
176 Elm St. NE., New Albin, IA



Conservation Café

Wednesday, 19th @ 9:30 AM -
Driftless Center

Come to enjoy some conversation, hot beverages, and a conservation program. Look out for our event postings on Facebook or our website for more information to come.



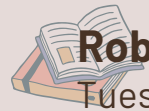
Afternoon with the Driftless

Tuesday, 25th @ 3:30 PM - Robey Library - 701 1st Ave. NW., Waukon, IA

April

Conservation Board Meeting

Tuesday, 1st @ 1 PM - Driftless Area Education & Visitors Center



Robey Library Storytime

Tuesday, 8th @ 10:30 AM -
Robey Library - 701 1st Ave.
NW., Waukon, IA



New Albin Public Library

Thursday, 10th @ 3:30 PM -
176 Elm St. NE., New Albin, IA



Afternoon with the Driftless

Tuesday, 22nd @ 3:30 PM -
Robey Library - 701 1st Ave. NW.,
Waukon, IA



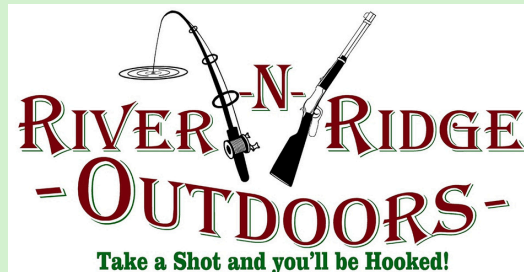
Conservation Café

Wednesday, 23rd @ 9:30 AM -
Driftless Center

This coffee club is all about Flowers! One of Assistant Naturalist Becca's favorite times of the year is spring wildflower season! Come to learn all about Iowa's Spring Ephemerals, enjoy some conversation, and have a hot beverage. To register or to receive more information on this event or any event you can call the ACCB at (563) 538-0401.

A Special Thanks to...

River N Ridge
Outdoors for donating
food for our education
animals & aquarium.





May

Conservation Board Meeting

Tuesday, 6th @ 1 PM - Driftless
Area Education & Visitors Center



New Albin Public Library

Thursday, 8th @ 3:30 PM -
176 Elm St. NE., New Albin, IA



Robey Library Storytime

Tuesday, 13th @ 10:30 AM -
Robey Library - 701 1st Ave.
NW., Waukon, IA



Springtime Photography

Friday, 16th @ 5:00 PM - Location
will be decided closer to the date.

Spring is in the air!! With the landscape bursting with new life this is the perfect time to capture its photograph. Join Assistant Naturalist Becca for a hike looking for all the new subjects for photography. Bring a camera (phone or professional) to explore what spring has in store! To register or to receive more information on this event or any event you can call the ACCB at (563) 538-0401.



Wildflower Hikes



Watch our Facebook for
pop-up Wildflower hikes!



Conservation Café

Date: TBD @ 9:30 AM - Driftless
Center

Come to enjoy some conversation, hot beverages, and a conservation program. Look out for our event postings on Facebook or our website for more information to come.

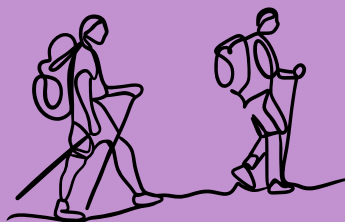


Afternoon with the Driftless

Tuesday, 27th @ 3:30 PM - Robey
Library - 701 1st Ave. NW., Waukon, IA

STAY TUNED!

This summer the naturalists are doing 3 nature day-camps! More details will be released soon including themes and how to register!

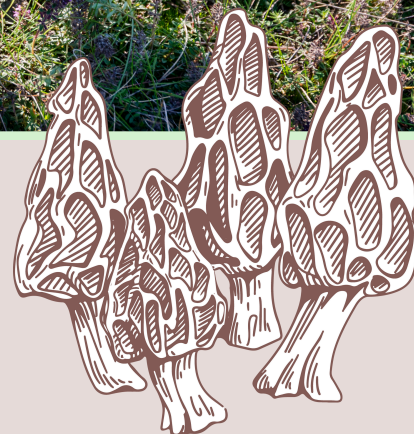




Early Spring Foraging

by Erin Cubbon, Naturalist

When someone brings up spring foraging, inevitably the first thing that comes to mind for most people is the morel mushroom. While this choice edible does indeed live up to the hype (in this humble naturalist's opinion anyway) it is far from the only tasty treat the wilds of the Midwest has to offer. This spring, let's expand our horizons and check out some of the other bounty that nature provides. Below you'll find a few of my favorites.



Dandelions

Yes, those dandelions! The very same ones that you might find growing in your front yard! Though considered a nuisance by many, when prepared properly these little flowers make a tasty treat with a flavor that is reminiscent of a wild mushroom. Dandelion blossoms are packed with vitamin c, protein, iron, and calcium and are plentiful and easy to spot in the spring with their brilliant yellow coloring. I like to pick a bowl full of the flowers, batter them in flour, and fry them up in a skillet with butter just like you would your morels. Trust me on this one, this "weed" is yummy.





Continued

Nettles

Most people, when they think of stinging nettles at all, think of them only as a mild annoyance you can encounter when walking on the woods. Even a light brush of skin against their leaves can cause a stinging sensation and even welts to form on those with especially sensitive skin. To the forager, however, the stinging nettle can be a delicious addition to your cooking repertoire if harvested correctly and during the right season. Early spring is definitely the right time to harvest these yummy greens. I find the simplest way to do it is to snip the top few pairs of leaves with shears while wearing a sturdy pair of gardening gloves. If you're feeling particularly bold, they can also be harvested barehanded by pinching and twisting the stem directly below the leaves. Because you will want to neutralize the tiny needle like hairs on the leaves that are the cause of the irritation, before eating the leaves you'll need to apply heat to them in some fashion. This can be done by steaming (my personal favorite nettle prep), sautéing, steeping in hot water to make a tea, or even dehydrating for later use. The possibilities are literally endless for this plentiful and delicious green.



Wild Asparagus

Technically asparagus is not actually a native species (neither is the dandelion for that matter), but as it seems to not be a threat to native species and it makes a wonderful addition to any foraged meal I thought I'd include it here. As many writers on foraging have noted in the past, a better name for the plant might be feral asparagus, as it came over to North America with European settlers centuries ago and has since escaped gardens to grow in places where it was never intended. The best place to look for wild asparagus is in ditches and along roads and fence rows, as it likes to grow in disturbed soils in full sun and near to water. The trick to finding wild asparagus however is that you don't go looking for it in the season that you want to harvest it in. It's an herbaceous plant that dies back every winter, and it's those first tender green shoots that you'll want to harvest in the spring. That means the best time to actually find the plants that you'll harvest is the summer or even fall before. At that time, the asparagus plant is easy to spot with its fluffy light green fronds that turn a golden yellow in the fall. Mark the location of the plant, and then check back in the spring and look for the fresh ready to cook stalks poking up through the soil.



As always, when doing any kind of foraging for wild plants you need to be 100% sure of an ID before consumption. If possible, one of the best ways to gain that knowledge and confidence is to go out with an experienced forager and learn directly from them. There are also a variety of excellent field guides and books available that can point you in the right direction. For our region I'd recommend looking into anything by Sam Thayer, but especially his classic *Foragers Harvest*. Happy spring, time to get out there and forage!

White Trout Lily

Erythronium albidum

The white trout lily is a perennial wildflower that is native to the woodlands of North America, particularly in the Midwest. It is known for its delicate and striking appearance. The flowers typically bloom in early spring, sometimes as early as March, and last for a short period, often just a few weeks.

Description

The white trout lily has a distinctive nodding, single flower that typically appear in early spring. White trout lily grows to about 4 to 8 inches tall, making it relatively small and easy to overlook among other spring flora. The petals are white, often with a hint of pink or purple near the base, and they are swept back, forming a star-like shape. The flowers are 1 to 2 inches wide and are formed on a slender stem. The plant has a pair of long, lance-shaped, and mottled leaves that are typically green with dark purple-brown spots, resembling the pattern on a trout's skin, which is where the common name 'trout lily' comes from.



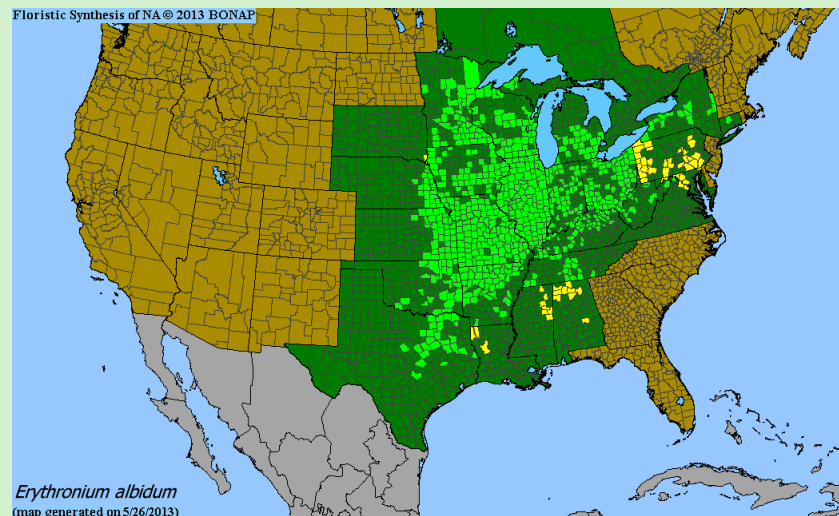
Habitat

White trout lilies thrive in shaded, moist woodland environments, often forming colonies in rich, well-drained soils. Its natural habitat is typically deciduous woodlands. It is commonly found in areas with partial to full shade, such as along forest floors under trees, where the canopy allows dappled sunlight to reach the ground. The plant prefers moist, loamy, and slightly acidic to neutral soils. It thrives in areas with high organic matter. While these plants do not tolerate standing water, they can often be found in floodplains, ravines, or stream banks.

Range

The white trout lily is found in the Eastern United States and parts of the Midwest. Its range extends from the Great Lakes region southward to Tennessee and North Carolina. The plant's range generally covers areas where temperate deciduous forests are common.

Right: Distribution map; of *Erythronium albidum*. Light green means native, not rare. Dark green is present. Yellow is Native, rare.





Scholarship Information

Allamakee County Conservation Foundation Scholarship Guidelines



The Allamakee County Conservation Foundation Scholarship Fund is offering a \$500 scholarship to Allamakee County students who plan to further their education in the degrees of environmental education, cultural interpretation, historical interpretation, outdoor recreation, or biological sciences. One \$500 scholarship will be offered to a senior from each of the area High Schools in Allamakee County; Postville, Allamakee Community, and Eastern Allamakee.

- Applicant must be a graduate or scheduled to graduate from an Allamakee County school district.
- Applicant must be pursuing a degree in natural resources or related field.
- Scholarship payments will be made directly to the college or university, upon receipt of an e-mail letter to the Allamakee County Conservation Foundation confirming the recipient's enrollment.
- Applications must be received by **April 1st, 2025**.
- Announcement of the recipient will be made by **May 6, 2025**. The award winner is encouraged to attend the June Allamakee County Conservation Board meeting. Meetings are held the 1st Tuesday of each month at the Driftless Area Education and Visitors Center; 1944 Columbus Road, Lansing Iowa.



Seasonal Opportunity!

Allamakee County Conservation Board

Looking for a fun opportunity to work this summer? Come work with us! As a seasonal employee of the ACCB you can look forward to being a part of the management of over 25 parks and natural areas in Allamakee County and the Driftless Area Education and Visitors Center. Fulltime staff will work to get you experience in an area of natural resources that you are interested in. In the past seasonal employees have helped electro-shock fish, participated in prairie burns, helped with environmental education programs and so much more. Our length of employment is flexible and we will give you 40 hours a week Monday-Friday. **Applications are available on the county website and need to be in to the ACCB by April 4th.**





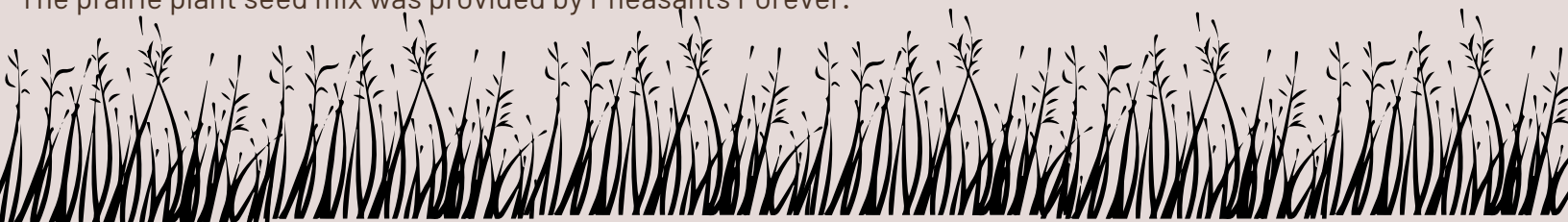
Park Spotlight: County Home Park

by Brody VanderKolk
861 Highway 9, Waukon, IA 52172

Allamakee County is commonly known for its vast selection of trout streams and river fishing spots like Paint Creek, Village Creek, the Upper Iowa River and the Mighty Mississippi. However, along highway 9 just north of Waukon, there is a pond that is home to hundreds of bluegill, bass, crappe, and catfish! This roughly 1.5 acre spring-fed pond is referred by the locals as The County Home Pond. Along with the pond, this park has two shelter houses that can be reserved for events, two parking lots, a small grill, trash cans, two pit toilets, big open and mowed lawns, and over one mile of maintained and mowed trails!



The trails are excellent for snow shoeing/skiing in the winter months and walking your pets or critter watching in the spring and summertime! Much of the trail system surrounds a large beautiful 3-acre tallgrass native prairie. The prairie plant seed mix was provided by Pheasants Forever.



"The first white settlers in Makee township were Patrick Keenan and his brother-in-law, Richard Cassiday. They lived together and in October of 1848, settled on Makee Ridge where they grabbed out and broke about three acres of and and built a log cabin. The dugout for the cabin and the old cistern can still be seen today. The area later became the county farm in 1863. R Keenan was the first man in Allamakee County to apply for and receive American citizenship at the Allamakee County courthouse through the U.S. Naturalization law. In this area during the winter of 1849 and 1850 prosser Whaley Killed 17 woles and had enough venison to keep his family in meat." Source: History of Allamakee County 1882.



ACCB and Iowa Department of Natural Resources staff completed a fishery assessment in 2020 finding a nicely balanced population of fish with Bluegill up to 8 inches, crappie up to 10 inches, and bass up to 21 inches. Channel Catfish are currently being stocked at the County Home Pond. You will also come across many types of native turtles and frogs in and around the pond!

In 2021, The ACCB was granted a fish habitat grant that would help increase the depth of the pond resulting in access to additional in-lake habitat and spawning areas, increased surface area, create two new silt retention holding areas providing additional reptile habitat on both sides of the pond, and re-shape the old spillway. In addition to these benefits, the project also provided much needed access to various locations on the pond for ACCB and IDNR-DFM staff and anglers of all ages and abilities.

This past fall, staff at the ACCB made a new trail system following the south side of the driveway connecting from the top shelter driveway, down to the main park trail system. There are NO motorized vehicles allowed on county trails. Staff will be updating the shelter houses during the summer months. We will remove the old/deteriorating wood on the shelter houses and replace it with new wood.

On top of replacing the old wood, we will also be re-staining the shelter houses and pit toilets. The shelter houses at County Home Park as well as any of our shelter houses in Allamakee County can be rented for all kinds of parties and events. To ensure your reservation please do so in advance by contacting us at the Driftless Area Education and Visitors Center at (563) 568-0400.

We do ask that while you use and appreciate this park and the many other parks in Allamakee County, you do so with respect and courtesy of the other park users that are at the park with you, or will use it after you! Please respect park boundaries such as property lines as well as no vehicles beyond designated areas. Also, please respect ALL fishing rules and regulations, which can be found on the Iowa DNR website. From myself and everyone here at the Allamakee County Conservation, thank you for enjoying our County Parks!





Conservation Café Inspiration

by Becca Hefflefinger, Assistant Naturalist / Office Manager

I love coffee! When I wake up in the morning, one of the first things I do is start the coffee pot. This ensures not only will my house smell fantastic but also ensures I get my caffeine in the mornings (and trust me I always have coffee in the house). One thing I have noticed over the past couple years while working seasonally is that I can bond and connect to people over a hot beverage. I also noticed that during class, if I had my hot beverage I was more inclined to focus and pay attention. The idea of starting this coffee club at the Driftless Center was really put into play when I asked myself “what was one way I could encourage community members to learn about nature.” I had seen the coffee club idea at my seasonal job and saw how it was well attended, so I wanted to try it out for myself.

The goal of this program is to allow attendees a time to converse, consume hot beverages, but also use this time to teach about the beautiful area of Iowa we call home. The Driftless Area or the Paleozoic plateau has so much to offer and teach to its residents. Conservation Café allows for me to not only consume my favorite hot beverage but also allows me to educate and learn all about what the Driftless Area holds. As this program progresses I want to bring in speakers from all areas of the Driftless Area to speak about their niche topic or topics. I would also like to incorporate topics of interest from the attendees as well.



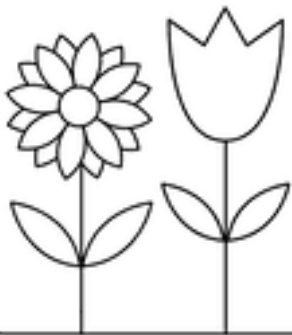
The first Conservation Café occurred in January with the topic being “What is the Driftless?”. This topic was chosen because when I first started with Allamakee County I noticed this was probably the most frequent question asked by the public. By presenting this topic to a crowd, it allowed me to not only educate the public about where they live but also learn the information myself since I am not originally from the area. There was a good turn out for being the first occurrence with around 6 people (which was more than I was expecting due to illness going rampant).

The second Conservation Café just occurred 2 weeks ago with a special guest presentation. We were fortunate enough to have Joshua Hefflefinger with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources Fisheries to come speak about native Brook Trout restoration and Rainbow Trout culture. We had a good turnout of 11 individuals! We plan on continuing this series monthly so watch our Facebook page for more events to come!

Kids Corner

SPRING GARDEN

R L L S M C V E X K
O K D A R A I N N M
S A X W L G R A S S
E I R I S I A B L U
O Z J S T U L I P C
Q S P R I N G R X D
E N I A Y U Y D L A
R E L X G D W S I I
P J N E S T M R L S
R F H Y N H K V Y Y



WORD LIST

BIRDS
DAISY
GRASS
IRIS
LILY

NEST
RAIN
ROSE
SPRING
TULIP



Homemade
GIFTS MADE EASY

Trout Lily Fun Facts!

- The Trout Lily gets its name from the color spots on the leaves.
- Trout Lily colonies can live 200-300 years even if the flowers can only be seen above ground for one month!
- Trout lily's are also sometimes called dogtooth violets or adders tongue.
- One of the first flowers to bloom in early spring time.
- Trout lilies are called perennials - which means they will keep coming back each year.



ACCB STAFF

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Erin Cubbon

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Operations Supervisor

Brody Vanderkolk

563-538-0403

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Allamakee County Conservation

Allamakee County Website

Hours -

Mon-Fri: 8AM - 4:30PM

Sat & Sun: Noon - 4PM

Location -

1944 Columbus Rd.,
Lansing, IA 52151

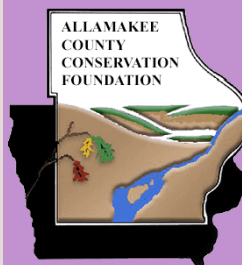
Board Members

- Jeanie Carrol
- Marilyn Clark
- Jesse Delaney
- Dennis Koenig
- Steve Weymiller



Mission

It is the Conservation Board's responsibility to acquire, develop, maintain and make available, to the inhabitants of the county, public museums, parks, preserves, parkways, playgrounds, recreational centers, environmental educational opportunities, county forests, wildlife and other conservation areas; and to promote and preserve the health and general welfare of the people; and to encourage the orderly development and conservation of natural resources; and to cultivate good citizenship by providing adequate programs of public recreation.



ACCF Board Members

- Dennis Blocker
- Jeanie Carrol
- Jesse Delaney
- Ross Geerdes
- Jens Kallevang
- Jim Kerndt
- Gary Krapfl
- Jane Regan

Mission

It is the Allamakee County Conservation Foundation's (ACCF) mission to enhance the quality of life for the citizens and visitors of Allamakee County by providing quality outdoor recreation facilities, environmental education, and by promoting the long-term protection of Allamakee County's natural resources and heritage.