

RENDEZVOUS: WALKING GROUPS

STORY BY JENNIFER STREISAND PHOTOS PROVIDED

Good for body & mind



Happy Hollow Walkers

The simple act of walking takes on a life of its own when done in a group. Walkers share common interests and topics of discussion, like a club on a college campus, activities on a cruise ship or travelers on a tour.

#1 Happy Hollow Walkers

Members of the Happy Hollow Walkers in West Lafayette meet three times a week to walk on the Trolley Line Trail in the park, says Temple Pearson, coordinator of the group. They walk and talk, observing diverse and exciting wildlife along the way.

"We've had bald eagles fly over. We've seen coyote and numerous wildflowers," she explains. "I am biased because it's the best walk," she says. "The Trolley Line Trail is in a valley, so it's shaded, and never too hot in the summertime.

The group meets all year long for the two-mile walk.

In the Happy Hollow Walkers group, there are about four to 12 walkers depending on the day, and the members are of varying ages. The group includes walkers of different speeds, too, because they separate into smaller groups to suit their walking

style. Slow, medium and fast walkers are all invited to attend.

"There are so many health benefits to walking," notes Pearson, "mentally and burn calories, strengthen your heart muscle and exposure to fresh air."

The Happy Hollow Walkers meet Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays at 10:30 a.m. Members meet for the walk in the first parking lot in the main driving entrance of the park, where there is a children's play gym. For more information contact Temple Pearson at temple.pearson@gmail.com.

#2 Exploring Nature

A cyclical look at plant and insect life is one of the goals of the Exploring Nature in the Nature Center Woods walking group, says coordinator Sam Postlethwait, who was a professor of biology for about 35 years at Purdue University before retiring. As a researcher, Postlethwait's area of interest was plants.

"We talk about the plants that are coming and the plants that are disappearing," he explains. "We try to know the names of all of the plants along the trail, but we also don't limit ourselves to plants." While Postlethwait's area of expertise is plants, there are others in the group who are well versed in birds, butterflies and other wildlife.

Adding stimulation and purpose to the walk, everyone is required to have what Postlethwait calls "an ooh-ah" moment, which is similar to the feeling one gets when watching a spectacular fireworks display or another phenomenon of great beauty.

"Everybody is looking. Everybody needs to make at least one contribution, one 'ooh-ah moment' during the walk," he says.

Postlethwait says the group is most effective when it's kept small with a dozen or fewer people.

"We are not that anxious for it to be a larger group than it is because pretty soon you have two groups. The trail is not that wide, so for us to be a group, we have to keep it small."

The Exploring Nature in the Nature Center Woods walking group meets Tuesday mornings at 9:30 in the exercise room at University Place. For more information contact Sam Postlethwait at Spostlw8@mac.com.

During the construction of the new Lindberg Road Bridge, which is expected to be completed by August, a portion of the walking paths in the Celery Bog will be closed to pedestrians, says Joe Payne, superintendent of West Lafayette Parks and Recreation. The closed portion is the segment of the Cattail Trail that crosses the bog along Lindberg Road where the new bridge is being built.

#3 Moms Walking Group

Parenting and exercise is the focus of the Greater Lafayette Area Moms, or GLAM, walking group, says Sunayana Ferrer, assistant organizer of GLAM.

"We meet three times a week, sometimes in the morning at 9:30, and sometimes after naps, which is about 3:45," she says. "It's a very fluid group, and we change and go with the flow."

The moms walk with their children—some moms carry their infant children and others are in strollers.

"What we do is we walk for a little, and then we stop and do some jumping jacks, so we get our cardio and our heart rate up," she explains.

Nature Center walking group



Then the group continues to walk, and they stop and do lunges, walk, and stop, and then squats, and so on.

They walk side-by-side in pairs or three moms, with their strollers. If the weather is nice and the kids are old enough, they ride their bikes or use their scooters, Ferrer says.

"Well, it's like a walking play group, basically," she notes. "Instead of sitting in somebody's living room chatting about parenting and what the kids are up to this week, we are doing side-by-side walking."

The group walks in several different locations around Lafayette and West Lafayette, including Cumberland Park, the Celery Bog and Armstrong Park. The schedule is posted on an online calendar, which posts all GLAM events. To join GLAM and see the calendar, go to www.meetup.com and search for moms in West Lafayette. There will be a prompt to join GLAM in order to see the content on the page, which is where the calendar of the walking group is posted, Ferrer says.

#4 Wabash Heritage Trail

A popular place to walk in Greater Lafayette is the Wabash Heritage Trail, which begins at the Tippecanoe Battlefield in Battleground, Tippecanoe County, and goes through Lafayette, into West Lafayette, and then back into Tippecanoe County, says Kathy Smith, manager of the trail. The entire trail runs 13 miles. Bicycle riders are not permitted on the trail within the county limits because it is a safety hazard for the hikers, Smith adds.

In the summer months, walkers enjoy longer evenings because the trail closes when it becomes dark, says Allen Nail, director of the Tippecanoe County Parks and Recreation Department. Of interest to walkers is that an extension of the trail is planned for this year.

"The trail will be extended in 2011 to actually physically connect to Fort Ouiatenon," Nail adds.

#5 Lafayette Trails (includes Columbian Park, Munger Park and Murdock Park)

If you want to walk in a group and don't know of one that suits your interests, you can always form your own.

It would be a good idea first to check with the department of parks and recreation where you would like to hold your walking group to find out if any rules or regulations would apply.

For example, in Lafayette, if a walking group is formally organized, the group requires some coordination with the city, says Ted Bumbleburg, superintendent of Parks and Recreation for the City of Lafayette.

"We would need a use agreement, certificate of insurance and dates and times of the walks," he says. "If it is more of a drop-in type of activity, where they just meet at the park, there are no restrictions except for the time of day when they are using a park facility."

With the nice weather here for months to come, walking is a great way to have camaraderie, fun, and thoughtful interactions with like-minded people. ☼



Above, 2 photos: Walkers with the Exploring Nature in the Nature Center Woods group, get a nature lesson as well as good exercise.



Moms walking group

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