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NORTHERN MIAMI VALLEY'S WEEKLY ENTERTAINMENT SOURCE

FREE



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Hiking

Man finishes
1,444-mile trek

*Plus, a list of local trails

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From the editor's desk

Welcome to the iN75! As the new editor of this publication, I wanted to take a moment to introduce myself.



My name is Lindy Jurack and I come to iN75 from the *Sidney Daily News* where I was the Localist editor for 3 1/2 years. I'm excited to take on the challenge of writing and designing the iN75, and you might notice a few changes this week.

I've launched a new cover design that hopefully grabbed your attention, and I'm introducing a new column called "Get Up & Go," which is full of things to do in Shelby, Miami and surrounding counties.

Also this week, we are continuing the "out and about" series with a story about hiking along with a list of local trails. I had the pleasure of interviewing Dayton hiker Andy Niekamp, who just finished a continuous hike on the Buckeye Trail and had positive things to say about hiking through our area.

I'd love to hear from readers about what they wish to see covered in iN75. Don't hesitate to get in touch with me via email at in75@ohcom-media.com or by phone at (937) 440-5255.

I look forward to delivering a publication you won't want to miss each week.

Out and about: On the trail

Hiking becomes stress reliever, exercise and fun

BY LINDY JURACK
iN75 Editor

Hiking isn't just a walk in the woods. A family hike can spark conversation or introduce kids to a new hobby. Nature enthusiasts can make treks in search of plant species or wildlife.

People looking for a fun way to drop extra pounds can get a workout on the trails. Those needing a quiet place to clear their heads can find it on a solo trip.

For Kettering resident Andy Niekamp, who just completed a 1,444-mile trek on Ohio's Buckeye Trail, hiking is about more than putting one foot in front of the other.

"Hiking is my personal fountain of youth," he said. "It makes me feel strong and energetic. I feel young again."

“It'll give me energy for months to come, and it'll give me memories for the rest of my life.”
— Andy Niekamp

After a month of planning, Niekamp stepped off on his longest through-hike March 20. Though he has completed the Appalachian Trail three times, this was his longest continuous trip and a dream he's always had. He left Dayton heading north through Tipp City, Troy, Piqua and Lockington, on his way to Defiance, then east toward Cleveland, south to Marietta, west to Cincinnati and back north to Dayton. He arrived home June 15, anxious for a pillow to sleep on and a change of clothes.

"I told myself before I left, if this trip ever became no longer fun, I would come home," he said. "After a few days of hiking, I realized how much fun the Buckeye Trail is, how interesting it is and how beautiful Ohio is."

On day two of what became an 87-day walk, Niekamp hiked through Troy, and he hit Piqua on his third day.

"One thing that really struck me going through Troy was how pretty the city of Troy is from the Great Miami River Bike Path. The court house is so

beautiful and being able to see it from the river was neat," he said.

Niekamp said he wandered off the trail to grab some coffee at Tim Horton's in Troy and was impressed by how friendly everyone was and how interested they were in his journey.

Hiking through Piqua, Niekamp especially enjoyed Johnston Farm, and further north, he checked out Lockington Dam.

As word trav-



PROVIDED PHOTO

ANDY NIEKAMP fords a creek on Newburn Road near Stockport during his recent hike on the Buckeye Trail.

eled that he was traversing the state on foot, Ohioans opened their doors to welcome him, especially in an unseasonably wet April. Niekamp, who blogged regularly along his way, received several emails from people offering him shelter for a night.

"Because we had so much rain, cold and wind, without the help of those people, I could not have completed this journey," he said, describing the random acts of kindness from strangers as "trail magic."

"The people of Ohio were wonderful. Hospitality is not just a southern term," he said.

Carrying about 25 pounds on his back, Niekamp, whose trail name is Captain Blue,

hiked an average of 19 miles every day, with the exception of 10 "zero days" when he rested and explored. He stayed with family and friends and spent a good portion of the trip camping outside, which he prefers.

About half of the Buckeye Trail keeps hikers on paved back roads and the other half goes through the woods, bike paths or canal towpaths. Niekamp is a member of the Buckeye Trail Association and said the group is always interested in speaking with landowners who allow the trail cross to their property.

Although he met up friends who joined him for a few days here and there,

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PROVIDED PHOTO

ANDY NIEKAMP poses at the southern terminus sign for Buckeye Trail in Eden Park, Cincinnati. Along his entire journey, he documented his hike by blogging and taking photos.

Hiking

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Niekamp's hike was mostly a solo one. He never ran into another person who was hiking the entire Buckeye Trail in one continuous shot. He said the underutilized trail is convenient because it winds through towns where hikers can get groceries or eat at restaurants instead of carrying all their food.

"I always tell people it's a great way to blow the cobwebs out of your mind. Hiking is a good stress reliever," he said. "It's a wonderful rewarding feeling when you complete a long hike like this. It'll give me energy for months to come, and it'll give me memories for the rest of my life."

Not everyone has the determination and stamina to take as many steps as Niekamp did, but hiking doesn't have to be about covering long distances.

"Hiking is the perfect hobby," said Deb Oexmann, avid hiker and director of Troy's Brukner Nature Center. "It doesn't cost a penny, it's good for you — both physically and mentally — you don't need any special skills or equipment, you can go alone or with friends."

More than 30 miles of hiking paths are open to hikers in Miami and Shelby counties, and more than 50 state parks in Ohio have trails. Some nearby state parks that offer hiking are Lake Loramie in Minster, Indian Lake in Lakeview, Kiser Lake in Conover, John Bryan in Yellow Springs, Buck Creek in Springfield and Sycamore in Trotwood.

Oexmann's first hiking experience was hunting with her dad in their Indi-

ana woods. They spent a lot of time walking in the forest and watching wildlife. After college, she hiked about half of the Appalachian Trail. Now she sometimes hikes for exercise but said she gets distracted and has trouble keeping up a good pace.

"My husband and I joke that there's always something that amazes, mystifies or stumps you when you're out in the woods," she said. "I think it's that anticipation of what's around the next corner that I enjoy the most."

Oexmann also finds hiking to be a stress reliever.

"Being in nature just sort of puts everything into perspective. It somehow makes the problems of the day seem less important in the big scheme of things," she said.

Whether you want to join the hikers club as a day-tripper or work your way up to hoofing it long-distance, Niekamp and Oexmann have advice to offer.

"Just do it," Niekamp said. "It's a great way to lose weight and see the outdoors. You see things differently and better on foot than you do in a car or on a bicycle."

Oexmann advises new hikers to be prepared.

"Wear comfortable tennis shoes, take along mosquito spray but only put it on if you need it, take a cell phone, let someone know where you will be and take along a trail map," she said, adding, "stop and smell the roses along the way and have fun."

To read more about Niekamp's hike, visit his blog at www.buckeyetrailhiker.com. For more information on the Buckeye Trail, check out www.buckeyetrail.org.

Miles of local trails available

BY DANA KING
For iN75

Hiking is a great opportunity to enjoy the peace of nature. If you're interested in hiking, check out the miles of trails in Miami and Shelby counties.

Miami County

Miami County Park has more than 28 miles of hiking trails for your enjoyment.

Charleston Falls Preserve offers a scenic 3.5 miles of hiking trails where hikers can take in the beautiful waterfall, prairie site and assorted vegetation. Charleston Falls is located at 2535 Ross Road, Tipp City.

F.L. Blankenship Riverside Sanctuary gives hikers the pleasure of hiking without the distance. The sanctuary is on five acres of land and offers a hike of 0.2 miles along the shores of the Stillwater River. The sanctuary is located on State Route 48, south of Covington.

With 2.19 miles of hiking trails, Garbry Big Woods Reserve offers visitors 272 acres of land to see and explore. Garbry Big Woods Reserve is located east of Piqua bordering both Casstown-Sidney and Statler roads.

The Garbry Big Woods Sanctuary, a separate site from the reserve, offers a 0.7-mile boardwalk through a wet beech-maple forest and is located at 2540 E. Statler Road, Piqua.

Goode Prairie Preserve is made up of 25 acres and has 0.42 miles of nature trails with an additional 1-mile loop trail of tall grass prairie community. Many species can be viewed at the preserve,



STAFF PHOTO/LINDY JURACK

BEV LOZEN and her daughter Madison, of Troy, head down a trail at Brukner Nature Center. On the cover with them are Leeanna Langston (left), of Englewood, and Sarah Stickley, of Greenville.

which is located at 40354 Union-Church Road, northwest of Covington.

Great Miami River Recreational Trail is home to 10.5 miles of hiking trail and offers a scenic wooded area and two parking areas. The trail is in Troy and parking is located at 901 Dye Mill Road and 940 State Route 202.

Greenville Falls State Scenic River Area is made up of 92 acres and offers visitors a loop trail that is 0.8 miles long. The area is located west of Covington on the corner of Rangeline and Covington-Gettysburg roads.

Hobart Urban Nature Preserve offers 1.35 miles

of hiking trail and is composed of 82 acres of land, including a planted prairie site. Located in Troy, the address is 1400 Tyrone, just off of Dorset Road.

Native Ohio prairie, 380 acres and 4.59 miles of hiking trails, are all offered at Stillwater Prairie Reserve north of Covington.

Twin Arch Reserve is located north of Troy at 3147 N. County Road 25-A and offers 0.71 miles of hiking.

John A. Wannemacher Reserve gives hikers 1.64 miles of trail where they can view acres of wetland, grassland, wooded area and more. The park is lo-

cated south of Troy on Monroe-Concord Road.

Located at 2645 E. State Route 41, Troy, Lost Creek Reserve and Knoop Agricultural Heritage Center includes 2.40 miles of hiking trails on 412 total acres.

Honey Creek Preserve is located at 4536 State Route 202, east of Tipp City, and offers hikers 0.97 miles of trails.

Don't forget Brukner Nature Center when you're deciding where to hike, as the center offers 6 miles of hiking trails. The trails are open from sunrise to sunset and offer opportunities to bird watch, see a variety of habitats and a challenging path for hikers.

Shelby County

Shelby County also offers something for hikers, with Canal Feeder Trail and Veterans Memorial Trail in Sidney.

Canal Feeder Trail is located at 975 S. Main Ave., Sidney, and runs along the towpath of the former Sidney Feeder Canal.

Veterans Memorial Trail offers hikers 4.5 miles of hiking and is located at the end of Johnston Drive in Sidney.

Just to the north is Lake Loramie State Park, which has five hiking trails from easy to moderate difficulty. Three trails are each 2 miles long, and the other two are each 1 mile long. The park is located at 4401 Fort Loramie-Swanders Road, Minster.

Summertime offers a great opportunity to see the nature that surrounds you, so take a walk on one of the many hiking trails Miami and Shelby counties have made available for your enjoyment.