

The Campus Chronicle

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Exclusive
Interview with
History Professor
Paul Byrd

Also
Sept. 11 survivor
shares his story at
DMACC

**“PLAYING
WITH FIRE”**

A Frankenstein Spin-Off
Thrills Black Box Theater

Photo by Krister Strandkov

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Former NYC firefighter speaks about his experience on 9/11

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On Sept. 26, DMACC hosted Joe Torrillo, a former New York City firefighter who was buried alive twice on September 11, 2001. Torrillo spoke to an overflowing room in Building 2, and many audience members were brought to tears during his story.

Torrillo opened his speech by giving some background information about his life. He talked about how he was born and raised in Brooklyn, and how the area he lived in was filled with gangs. Torrillo joked by describing his neighborhood as a “spagetto,” because it was a dangerous area that consisted of Italians.

Torrillo went on to talk about how the place he grew up made him destined to become a civil service worker, which inspired him to want to become a police officer.

He ended up going to school to become a firefighter, and he graduated at the top of his class. After he got through his fire program Torrillo took his first assignment as a firefighter at a firehouse directly across from the World Trade Center buildings. After working for that fire department for several years, Torrillo became the Director of the Fire Safety Unit to educate his community on fire safety. Torrillo’s work sparked the interest of his community and the toy company Fisher-Price.

Fisher Price contacted Torrillo to make an action figure based on him and his work. Torrillo eagerly agreed

and the figure Billy Blaze was created. Torrillo and Fisher-Price agreed to launch the toy on September 11, 2001. When giving his speech, Torrillo explained that he picked the date because it represented 911, the number you dial for emergency services. Torrillo talked about how the day was supposed to be filled with excitement and joy, and that nothing would have prepared him for the day to come.

On the morning of September 11, 2001, Torrillo was in his office when the first tower was struck. Like most of America, Torrillo thought it was a terrible accident. Torrillo frantically left his office to get ahead of traffic so he could attend the conference in New York City to unveil the Billy Blaze action figure. When he reached the Brooklyn Bridge, he watched the second tower get hit, and he said the only thing he could think about was the original fire station he had worked for. Torrillo explained that he immediately turned around so that he could go help that fire station.

This was the point in Torrillo’s story that the room he was speaking to fell completely silent, and the entire audience became overwhelmingly somber. Torrillo talked about how he knew that the towers would eventually collapse because he had studied the Twin Towers specific architecture while in college. Torrillo told the group that he needed to warn the first responders of this, and that when he eventually got geared up and made it to the first tower to spread the warning the tower began to crumble.

“For the first time in my life I knew I



Photo courtesy Lisa Schmitz, DMACC

wasn’t going to be able to save people,” Torrillo said. He then said he heard a large rumble and knew he only had about ten seconds left to live.

Torrillo went on to tell us that the first tower fell on him, burying him completely, breaking his ribs and fracturing his skull. He was rescued quickly and put on a boat for fast transportation to a hospital. When placed on the boat the south tower started to fall causing the debris to rush towards Torrillo and all the crew on board.

Torrillo said that everyone on board began jumping into the water to save themselves while leaving him behind strapped to a medical board. Although severely injured, Torrillo fought off the board and flung his body down to the engine room for safety. Torrillo was eventually rescued by the first

responders and made a full recovery.

This concluded Torrillo’s story, but he went on to end his speech by giving the room advice. He talked about how he did not understand why something so awful happened to him. Torrillo said he questioned why he decided to turn around that day instead of continuing to the Billy Blaze conference.

As time went on, Torrillo realized he made the decision due to his instinct to save people and would not have done anything differently because he had impacted people’s lives.

“You all can be Billy Blazes,” said Torrillo, and ended his presentation by telling the room they needed to go on to impact people’s lives and that situations in life are not always what is expected, but that does mean they are not bad.



Photos by Krister Strandkov

“Playing With Fire” lights up the Black Box

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“Playing With Fire” is a play that follows the events after the story of Frankenstein. It was performed at DMACC’s Black Box Theater the last weekend of September and the first weekend of October.

The problem with me writing an article about a month after production is that you will never see this particular production. I can tell you the plot of the play and its tiny details, which I will do. But I want to focus more on the amazing experience I had and why you should check out or even be involved with the theater program here at DMACC.

“Playing With Fire,” subtitled “After Frankenstein,” was written by Barbara Field and directed by Miranda Turner. It tells the story of an unhealthy father-son relationship between Dr. Frankenstein and his monstrous creation. Dr. Frankenstein is on the hunt for his creation, filled with revenge because it strangled his wife.

He finds him but notices major differences from when he first created him. The creation is well-versed and very well-spoken, unlike the unintelligible freak that he knew of. He pulls out his weapon but doesn’t fire, due to his curiosity of learning more about his creation.

The story heavily relies on flashbacks to help the audience recount the events and to deepen the characters of Dr. Frankenstein and the creation. As they continue to recount the memories of their troubled past, we learn Dr. Frankenstein is dying.

It’s a rather heartbreaking play about a man so caught up in revenge that he can’t breathe a single breath without saying his creation’s name: “Adam,” also the name of God’s first human creation in the Bible.

I would like to share the experience I had while watching the play. Immediately when walking into the theater I realized how different the stage was. When I think of a stage for a play my brain usually drifts towards the “proscenium arch.”

The proscenium stage is where the audience is seated on one side of the stage, elevated from front to back. From the audience’s perspective, actors are seen in a two-dimensional playing view.



But here at DMACC, it is different. The Black Box Theater gives us a more immersive experience where the audience is significantly closer to the actors — we are quite literally on the same floor as them, and we are on the stage with them. The seating arrangement is similar to a four-sided arena but with one side occupied to fit a set. We get to see the actors and their different physicality because we are not just seeing them on a two-dimensional field.

As a person who wants to direct as a career, I had the privilege to talk to the director of the play, Miranda Turner. This isn’t the first time she has been involved with this field of work; she started as an actor at the age of three! Eventually, she started directing and has been for 15 years. I am a sucker for good directors and good in-depth character studies, and Turner really considered that for this play.

Every question an actor should impose on themselves when it comes to character analysis has to be the: What? When? Why? And How? Turner instilled that philosophy with the actors of the play: feel this character rather than just play it.

DMACC student Ayden Frisk, who played Dr. Frankenstein’s mentor, Professor Krempa, talks about

a method where you look at every line of the character that is being played, and figure out the intent and motivation behind it.

With every actor fully understanding their characters as well as having a fully immersed experience in the Black Box Theater, it creates an atmosphere that encapsulates the audience. Being personal is a huge aspect of performance because that’s how humans are. Being close and personal is an important tool for acting because you can take it in many different directions. You can make an audience feel uncomfortable, you can make an audience empathize with you, you can make them feel happy, sad, or even angry.

Every actor in this play has nailed their part and I’m excited to see what’s to come for the Black Box Theater. If you are curious to see more of Miranda Turner’s works she is currently in production for another play she is directing called “Wicked Queen” at the Tallgrass Theatre Company in West Des Moines.

The next production coming to DMACC Ankeny is “Merge,” about the sale of Atari to Warner Bros.

DMACC introduces new logo, website design

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DMACC officially unveiled its new website design and branding to the public on Monday, Oct. 23.

The website's design had not been updated since 1988, and it features a brand-new three-dimensional brand logo with a modernized look.

The website displays new photographs and videos of students, staff, and campuses, along with a bright "DMACC blue" layout that is intended to be simple and easy to navigate.

The effort to update the website and logo were lead by Todd Jones, DMACC's Director of Marketing and Public Relations, and Noah O'Tool, DMACC's Website Coordinator. I sat down with the two of them to discuss the major changes and the reasoning behind them.

Jones and O'Tool said that the original push for a renovated design came from Shelli Allen, DMACC's current VP of Enrollment Services and Student Success. Allen challenged Todd Jones several years ago to make a change, but the project did not kick into full gear until after the COVID-19



pandemic. Jones stated it was a perfect time to introduce something fresh to the community.

O'Tool was the main leader behind the project, and he and a team of graphic designers worked together to create a cohesive website and logo that refreshed the DMACC brand altogether.

Jones said O'Tool agreed that DMACC's updated brand creates a fresh and unique look that, according to Jones, conveys a sense of community, alignment, and collegiate feeling.

Jones also mentioned that the goal of the design change was not just to have an updated look or logo, but to change the way the people perceive DMACC as a reputable institution. Whether that was competing colleges



1966-1968



1969-1972



1973-1976



1977-1984



1985-1987



1988-TODAY

Above, left: DMACC's new logo.

Above, right: Previous DMACC logos throughout the years.

and universities or students and staff, the goal was to make the school's brand look modern and professional.

Not only has the appearance of DMACC's website changed, but the website has been significantly simplified for easy access, according to Jones and O'Tool. The new website now has 700 links compared to the previous website which held thousands. The home page features four main categories with an organized list of subcategories, a welcome statement with a link to apply to the collage,

and updated high-quality photos and videos.

Finally, Jones and O'Tool said that the rest of DMACC's sub-sites, such as MyDMACC, will be fully updated next spring, and they advised that those who come across broken links on the website can scroll down to "Web Updates" to submit a problem.

Students, faculty adjust to new software platform: Canvas

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A new school year has started at DMACC and Fall 2023 has proven to be eventful as DMACC has said goodbye to Blackboard and turned to Canvas.

For more than 10 years, DMACC Community College has used Blackboard as its primary software for online learning.

In 2020, DMACC's contract with Blackboard was coming to a close, and the faculty was tasked with helping to choose between switching to Blackboard Ultra, D2L, or Canvas. Canvas won out, and the transition to the new learning management system (LMS) began in late 2022.

The Campus Chronicle spoke to students about what they thought of Canvas. Dianne Augustine, a first-year elementary education student from Ceder Rapids, said she had never used either application before but said she loves Canvas. Specifically, the easy-to-use calendar feature helps with organization and keeping track of homework.

Even Students who had previous experience with Blackboard had only good things to say about Canvas. Joe Kimble, a first-year business education student from Carroll, used Blackboard all throughout

high school he said that making the switch was quite the challenge but he quickly picked up Canvas and enjoyed the to-do list option.

Canvas's organization tools were a common theme for many. Students said they like having the work laid out in front of them.

Rachel Murdock, a speech professor at the Ankeny campus, was part of the committee that helped pick the next LMS after the DMACC contract with Blackboard ran out, and advocated for Canvas as her top choice.

The advisory board consisted of 37 people from any DMACC Campus. Representatives from Blackboard, D2L, and Canvas gave presentations and examples of how their systems would work.

Then everyone completed a survey. Murdock said Canvas was a clear winner from the start.

Murdock spoke about the LMS change: "In the big picture of things the switch was needed ... yes there are still things I find annoying about Canvas but just the way the contract was coming up and the way the Blackboard system was set up and how the canvas is set up, it's the best choice for us and our students."

About the transition, Murdock added, "It's a lot to say we need to transfer over all these classes and they didn't transfer neatly, it still had lots of quirks



... It's a process."

It's difficult to go from something you've worked with for years to something not as familiar. Thomas Tweedy, a long-standing campus counselor at DMACC has used Blackboard for the last decade and is learning to adjust as he goes.

Tweedy said, "On anything new, you figure out as issues arise and things go, training only goes so far."

He said he has begun to get into the swing of the new LMS and only finds issues when he can't help students. "The awareness of navigation is something I miss; when a student had an issue I could help them figure it out because I had worked with it for ten years. If a student had a problem another student had probably had that problem... I miss having the certainty."



Susan Leek, Upper Iowa University

We offer eight week sessions, and if you take two classes every eight weeks, that's the same as being a full time student. So instead of balancing four classes for 16 weeks, it's two classes for eight weeks



Julie Tannehill, Missouri Western State University

We are an applied learning university, so we don't do classes on Fridays to allow for different learning opportunities, research projects, and internships.

Transfer Fair highlights

Kyenn Baccam

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Tessa Johnson, DMC Medicine and Health Science
 DMU has built a new campus in the West Wing. We offer 10 degree programs in medicine and health science. And it's a really nice collaborative environment because everyone on campus is a graduate student interested in working somewhere in healthcare. So there's an opportunity for a lot of inter-professional education and then of course education within these specific programs as well where you get to do your on campus lectures and labs, as well as a few of our programs have clinical rotations or fieldwork experiences as well.



Allison Gus, Truman State University
 Truman State University is a highly inclusive, highly academic institution that is providing quality education and a quality life experience at an incredibly low price.



Michelle Carlson, Purdue Global
 Purdue global is designed to be an online university for working adults. So people who have gotten their associate's degree here and are going to continue their education or want to continue their education and possibly work too, we offer online programs and anything from nursing to business to I.T, health and sciences, social behavioral sciences. And so it's a good fit for people who can't stop everything to get their bachelor's but they want a bachelor's degree, so we can assist them with that.



William Utter, William Penn University
 We have a very diverse campus. You can see the whole world all on our campus because we represent a school of 12 nations and 13 different cultural backgrounds, and we offer a variety of majors.

Professor Byrd talks college advice and comic books

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You may have seen Professor Paul Byrd walking the halls of DMACC listening to heavy metal, teaching a variety of political science classes at the Ankeny Campus, or on the news occasionally giving his opinions on recent national affairs. Paul Byrd has been a professor at Des Moines Area Community College for 14 years, and on October 2 I had the opportunity to sit down with him and discuss his life inside and outside of DMACC.

Professor Byrd is originally from San Diego, but he has spent most of his life in Iowa. After graduating high school, Byrd pursued his secondary education at Iowa State University, originally for aerospace engineering, with the goal of eventually working for NASA in mind. When he attended ISU Professor Byrd ended up changing his major and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in history and political science. He then went on to pursue a master's degree in Russian history and international relations with an emphasis on conflict resolution, which he said he finds most interesting surrounding politics.

When I asked him what made him interested in history and political science, Byrd said, "I always thought it was cool," and went on to tell me how he read "Peter the Great" as a child which immediately sparked his interest.

After Byrd graduated from college, he took his first position at DMACC. Professor Byrd said he was originally unsure about how he would like the job, but he told me that after his first day, he instantly loved everything about it. Professor Byrd has been teaching for over 14 years now, and throughout that time he has taught at Iowa State University, Grandview University, Ashford University, and of course DMACC at both the Urban and Ankeny campuses.

Currently, Professor Byrd teaches history and political science at DMACC. He teaches a variety of classes including American National Government, Comparative Politics, International Relations, Politics and Terrorism, Global Studies, Asian History, African History, Western Civilizations, State and Local Government, and Russian History which is his favorite to teach.

Professor Byrd, said that one of the coolest opportunities he has had while working for DMACC was meeting the president of Kosovo. Byrd said that he was the chair of the international year committee that semester, and that he was able to sit down in a meeting with the president of Kosovo while he was visiting the college.

Outside of his work here at DMACC, Professor Byrd has had the opportunity to travel the world. Byrd said that his favorite place he has traveled to is Russia, and that one day he would like to visit Japan, Croatia, and Botswana. Professor Byrd mentioned that he also enjoyed visiting Belgium, except for



the fact that he got stranded in a Belgium forest in the middle of winter.

If there is one thing you should know about Professor Byrd, it is that he will always have a funny story to tell. In classes that Professor Byrd teaches he will tell stories or jokes surrounding the class which makes his classes fun and engaging. Sometimes he will get a bit off-topic, like the time he told my International Relations class that he got attacked by a goose on campus while riding his bike, but that story is an exception.

When Professor Byrd is not teaching, traveling, or getting attacked by geese on campus, he enjoys spending time with his six kids, going to concerts, and creating comic books as a side profession. When I talked to Professor Byrd, I was curious about his life outside of work, and I was surprised to learn that he is a freelance author and graphic designer. Byrd writes

"Take chances on things you may or may not like because you might have a different path for yourself, and you can't know that without trying new things."

and designs comic books such as the "Fall of Man" series and is the founder of A.G.E. Comics. Professor Byrd also mentioned that he enjoys listening to hardcore and metal music, going to concerts and mosh pits, and that the best concert he has ever attended was performed by the band Haste the Day.

Professor Byrd said that his favorite part about teaching is when students have "light bulb moments," which he describes as when students understand concepts or if something clicks with them. He also talked about how he enjoys seeing these "light bulb moments" apply to students who discover an academic pathway to pursue, which he said is what is great about the Liberal Arts program. Byrd talked about how the Liberal Arts program allows students to find their passion as they go through college and takes the pressure off students if they feel the need to change their major like he did.

Professor Byrd spoke about how he enjoys being able to teach his classes in a way that is fun for him but also engaging for his students. From my experience in his classes, Professor Byrd does an excellent job instructing and engaging his students, and he is always willing to help those who need it.



"Fall of Man," written and lettered by Paul Byrd

I ended my meeting with Professor Byrd by asking him the question, "From the perspective of a professor, what is one piece of advice you would give college students?"

Byrd left me with his key takeaway: "Take chances on things you may or may not like because you might have a different path for yourself, and you can't know that without trying new things."

Q&A with “Merge” director Brittany Rebhuhn

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Note: This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

This November, DMACC Theatre is performing “Merge,” a dramatized look into the rise and fall of Atari, a video game-based company that saw its peak in the early 1980s.

Director of “Merge,” Brittany Rebhuhn, gives insight into this retro play.

Q: Tell me about “Merge.”

A: OK, so “Merge” is a play about the rise and fall of Atari. We follow the story we open up with how Atari was generated and created and how the idea started and then we go to its demise — the story is reminiscent of a modern Silicon Valley. Kind of like startup life and culture. So there are lots of parallels to today.

Q: So why “Merge”? What drew you to its story?

A: I didn’t pick it. Carl reached out to me to see if I would direct. What excites me about the play is that it starts in the 1950s and ends in the 80s. So we cover many many years and many many places for the evolution of video games. That’s exciting for me because then were not stuck in a living room for two hours. There is lots of room to be creative in how we tell the story.

Q: After reading the script how excited were you?

A: I was excited to direct but the things that excited me also challenged me. I was also excited to learn more about video games. My video game knowledge is limited. I grew up playing video games but it was mostly Duck Hunt. I think those who grew up playing Atari will find it interesting.

Q: What’s the process of putting on a production like this?

A: Good question. It requires a community. We started rehearsals in early October, and before that, the production team met and discussed the concept of where we see it going. Including any ideas we had that we wanted to incorporate. Then we cast the show. I actually couldn’t be at auditions, I was directing another play at the time, so I let the production team cast the show.

When we had our first read-through it was my first time meeting the actors and I think that process worked very well. In the rehearsal process, we do blocking and then we have a couple of weeks to work on it. We started rehearsing on October 10. Our rehearsals were Sunday through Thursday for three hours. It’s a big commitment for the students. Then it’s tech week.

Q: Is it a different experience directing here?

A: Different but kind of the same. I had never worked with anyone over here on the production team or with the cast. And the production team here are just exceptional creators and collaborators so the process just seemed seamless. Which is always something you want when making something like this.

Q: So, it’s opening night. How are you feeling?

A: I am excited. I’m excited for the actors and crew they are ready. I think we’ve peaked at the right time.



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Native prairie landscaping offers

Sarah Outterson-Murphy
Special to the Chronicle

Fluffy seeds wave along little bluestem stalks. Tiny purple aster petals pour down shrubby branches that flop on the dry soil. End-of-summer sun beats down as bees dangle from flowers in every direction, readying food in dried flower stems and soil burrows for their winter hibernation. And under the earth, prairie roots lock carbon dioxide deep into the soil.

Gardeners and landscape managers all over Iowa have long been working to restore native prairie plants to the landscape they once covered. Eric Miller, acting co-president of the Iowa City chapter of Wild Ones, a national nonprofit organization supporting native plants, explained why he's turning his condo lawn into patches of prairie.

"It's more than just an aesthetic thing that you get from native plant gardening because you're contributing to the health of the ecosystem," said Miller. "You're supporting the pollinators and the other insects that use the plant. And those creatures, those living things, along with the plants, are the base of the food web that everything else depends on."

Miller explained that birdwatchers used to emphasize planting fruit trees as food for birds, but more recently, they've shifted focus to the whole ecosystem of native plants and insects. "If you don't provide plants that attract insects, then you're not going to have nesting birds," he said.

The effort to revive ecosystems through native plants is happening more broadly in Iowa. At the Tallgrass Prairie Center at the University of Northern Iowa, Dr. Laura Jackson has spent 30 years helping county managers rethink how they plant the strips of land along highways. Jackson studies how to improve large-scale restoration of native prairies through better seed supply, planting methods, and maintenance.

Beyond supporting ecosystems and insects, two more reasons to plant prairie are to help with water quality and to slow climate change, according to Jackson. Prairie plants excel at soaking up the chemical fertilizer runoff from Iowa's corn and soybean fields, which helps prevent that runoff from getting into public water supplies or killing fish.

With their deep roots and adaptability to drought, prairie plants also are able to survive heat from a changing climate while sequestering large amounts of biomass into the soil as their roots die and regrow each year,

"Your mom can tell you how to grow a hosta; your grandma can tell you how to take care of it and split it, but most likely they can't tell you what a rattlesnake master is or how to grow it; they can't tell you what a butterfly weed is. That's where we come in," Kaytlan Moeller from Mowing to Monarchs.



For Iowans looking to diversify their landscaping, cup-plant is one option for native wildflower landscaping. Photo by Sarah Outterson-Murphy

according to research in the Soil Science Society of America Journal. Unlike trees, whose carbon is stored aboveground in wood that can easily burn back into the atmosphere, prairie plants send carbon deep into the soil where it will stay as long as the prairie grows.

Those ecological benefits are not usually the primary reason counties come to the Tallgrass Prairie Center for help with roadside prairie, Jackson acknowledged. Weed management and erosion control are more direct reasons for adding native plants, she said. But a deeper, more personal connection to prairie plants may also be part of the reason for many.

"We run into landowners who grew up in the 1960s in Iowa where there was a lot more nature around them. They could swim in the creek, they could run around in the pastures and explore and go hunting and things like that, and that Iowa is gone now. And so some of them are interested in [prairie] as a way to kind of give back to that rural community where they grew up," said Jackson.

In Iowa City, the superintendent of Parks and Forestry, Tyler Baird, has been working since 2016 to plant more prairie plants in public gardens and landscaping, using a New Perennialism design style that emphasizes native perennial plants rather than annuals.

In addition to their ecological benefits, "native plants connect people to the place and the floral history of the land," Baird said by email.

At the Iowa City Community School District, Grounds Manager Ben Grimm has spent 10 years developing prairies on school grounds, including outdoor classrooms with monarch way-stations and insect hotels. The district recently won the Green Ribbon Award through the US Department of Education for its sustainability efforts, including its prairies.

"There's a real push for kids to get out in the sunlight to learn about their local environment and sustainability," Grimm said.

Farther northeast, in Dubuque, Kaytlan Moeller runs a county initiative designed to help people bring that sense of nature back home. The Mowing to Monarchs program, now in its third year, supports homeowners to convert lawns of turfgrass into pollinator gardens, one 10 by 10 patch at a time.

"Typically, a front yard isn't used for grilling or kickball," said Moeller. "We say, why not have native plants instead of lawn?"

Turfgrass, which is native to rainy Europe, turns brown in the Iowa heat, she said. By contrast, native plants provide color and beauty, while also benefiting pollinators like monarch butterflies.

Moeller's team, with the help of the Dubuque County Master Gardeners, provides free native

ers a range of ecological benefits



An example of native landscaping at the home of Eric Miller, acting co-president of Wild Ones, a not-for-profit organization that promotes environmentally sound landscaping. Photo By Eric Miller

plants and ongoing workshops to 60 people a year. Landowners sign on for three years of coaching, which is crucial since native plants are less familiar to many.

“Your mom can tell you how to grow a hosta; your grandma can tell you how to take care of it and split it, but most likely they can’t tell you what a rattlesnake master is or how to grow it; they can’t tell you what a butterfly weed is. That’s where we come in,” Moeller said.

Moeller says many of those who join Mowing to Monarchs have previously dabbled in landscaping ideas like No Mow May, but she believes No Mow May is not the best way to help pollinators. It’s important to distinguish between deliberately growing native plants, and just allowing weeds to take over.

“No Mow May is great for areas a little further north, where plants stay dormant longer, but here in Iowa it encourages more weedy things, things that don’t help pollinators,” she said.

Those weeds can be a big concern for would-be native plant gardeners because often neighbors can have opinions about the changing landscape. At the Iowa City Community School District, for example, neighbors sometimes found schools’ prairie plantings an unwelcome change, whether because of fears about bees and rodents, or because of the wilder look.

“There isn’t a fence, necessarily, dividing neighbors’ property versus our property. So technically, it appears as if their lawns are bigger

and kind of extended into the district property. Well, the second you put up prairie, it kind of changes that aesthetic,” said the grounds manager, Ben Grimm.

Similarly, a 2020 Iowa City Parks plan to plant 86 acres of prairie was reduced to 57 acres after push back from neighbors concerned about the lack of recreational space.

“There will always be some level of resistance to any planting style that is implemented. We live in a diverse community with many ideas and experiences that shape the way plants are viewed. We receive occasional complaints about our more natural planting efforts and our prairie areas spread around town. However, we have received many more compliments and praise for our efforts than complaints,” said Baird by email.

One last challenge to maintaining prairies can be funding. There is a misconception that prairies are a cheap option compared to lawns, said Grimm. But native plant seeds are not cheap, and prairies still need maintenance.

“A lot of people say, ‘Oh, it’s a cost-saving measure,’” said Grimm. “And it does save money, but it’s not significant.”

Funding cuts are directly affecting a major prairie in Iowa, the Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge in Prairie City. There, 6,000 acres of windswept prairie, crossed with gravel roads, sustain a herd of several dozen bison and elk. A visitor’s center welcomes children with exploratory exhibits celebrating prairie plants and animals. Scott Gilje, refuge manager, described the refuge’s “hands-off

approach” to managing the bison, with the goal of keeping them as wild as possible while still accessible to the public.

“I want people to come out and enjoy their national wildlife refuge,” Gilje said.

But funding cuts have made it harder to preserve and maintain the bison and their habitat. In the last seven years, the Neal Smith refuge staff has gone from 12 full-time employees to three, due to cuts, Gilje said.

When asked about the funding cuts to the Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge, Senator Joni Ernst’s office replied in a voicemail, “The omnibus bill that funded the government for fiscal year 2023 did appropriate the US Fish and Wildlife Service a little over \$1.5 billion.”

Back in Iowa City, Eric Miller is doing his part for the prairies by working to expand his local chapter of Wild Ones, starting new prairie plants to give away, and adding new natives to his gardens.

“A really lovely one that hugs the ground is Missouri Evening Primrose,” Miller said. “It has really interesting foliage, and just really lovely big yellow flowers, kind of a pale yellow flower. Its coloration attracts moths, the main pollinator of the plant. And it has that coloration because that makes the flowers visible at night when most of the moths are out.”

Does he like those flowers because they sustain moths, or because they’re simply beautiful?

Why not both?

Invest in your future self, you'll be thankful



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You are at your high school commencement and the valedictorian is giving the infamous ‘the world is your oyster’ speech. The moment you have waited your entire childhood for is here. You are 18 now, you can vote, and you are finally independent. You can make your own doctors’ appointments, take out loans and build your own credit all without needing

your parents. If you wanted to, you could go to college, join the workforce, live on your own, or even join the army. Adulthood is the freedom you can imagine it to be.

Our parents, mentors, and guides taught us everything we know up until that very moment at graduation. They either made or guided us toward decisions that would benefit our futures. They raised us; fed, clothed, and put a roof over our heads. Everyone and everything surrounding us was designed to lead us to that very moment when you are sitting in that chair waiting for your name to be called.

Whether some of us realize it in the moment or find out later — the trajectory of our lives changes forever — from the hands of others, into your own.

It is an absolute truth that the world is your oyster, and whatever you put your mind to, you can achieve. However, immediately after graduation, reality sets in. Freedom is not exactly what

you imagine it to be. Making your own decisions is quite nerve-racking. Being an adult is not all peachy. You realize you now must pay taxes, and in the court of law, you are no longer considered a juvenile. Unlike our childhood, the world can feel against us. It can feel like a giant test, set up to make us fail. Sometimes, being an adult is exhausting and you miss your childhood. All these thoughts are not only normal but they are also expected.

Adulthood is not the same phase of our lives as our childhood. Our childhood is meant to prepare us for the rest of our lives living in adulthood.

As Winston Churchill once said, “With great power comes great responsibility.” Adulthood gives you power over your own life, but when dealing with the power of life, if you are not responsible and careful, there are an array of consequences that life will supply you with.

Here you are. You chose to continue higher education. You have decided

on a career path, or you have not, but you know you are on the right path in discovery. You have an 8 a.m. class, but it is cold outside and technically you do not have to go because attendance does not count against your grade. You are an adult now — you can decide to skip class without receiving any disciplinary action. Then again, you are an adult now, and you have the responsibility to always make the right choices. You are an adult now, and your choices and actions affect your life. You can choose to be lazy and sleep in, or you can choose to get up and work hard to build the life that you not only deserve but the life you have always dreamed about.

Go ahead and enjoy that party Friday night, but make sure you CHOOSE to do YOUR homework before going. So that on Monday you are proud and progressing, not stressed and disappointed.

Testosterone shots have changed my life



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A four-hundred-milligram testosterone injection weekly. That is normal for me. Every Friday morning, when I get up, it’s the first thing I do besides maybe getting a cup of coffee.

I grab the syringes, the two sets of needles, and the small vile, which holds one dose of my injections.

From there, I head to the bathroom to start my Friday morning ritual. I get myself situated in a comfortable spot

where I can sit with my knees at a 90° angle. I have to keep my legs at a 90° angle. Otherwise, I can nick a vein or nerve in my leg and cause bruising or even heavy amounts of blood.

I then sit there for a second. Usually, these few seconds are me hyping myself up to finish the process. Each item is wrapped carefully in plastic to help keep them sterile. The syringes already have a needle. That’s the needle that I have to put in my leg. It is not the needle that I draw the testosterone with.

I remove the needle on the syringe and replace it with a new needle. This needle is slightly larger, making it easier to withdraw from the vile. From there, I take the syringe and withdraw the testosterone from the vial. I leave enough air space in the top before removing the used needle, put the cap on it, and place it in a safe, hazardous container. I then grab the original needle and put it back on the syringe before removing all of the air from inside of the syringe and prepare to put it in my leg.

After that, I clean an area on my upper thigh where it is the fattest, pinch the skin on my leg, and hype myself up to inject the needle into my leg.

I used to have a deep fear of needles growing up, but then I started taking

Depo shots to get over this fear. Then it went from the Depo shots to doing testosterone shots, and I can say that I don’t have a fear of needles anymore.

Now, reading about the process, it seems like this can take forever, but it’s maybe a five-minute job. But that’s five minutes every Friday, every week, for the rest of my life. Or until I’m comfortable with where I’m at with my body.

Unlike cis-gender men, I was not born with the amount of testosterone that a man is usually born with.

Before I was on testosterone, I despised every ounce of my being. I wanted nothing more than to rid myself of the body that I was given, whether that meant life or death. Finally, on my 16th birthday, my mom gifted me the ability to take testosterone. For two years, I have consistently taken testosterone every week of my life. While it’s an annoying process, I’ve had to adjust my schedule several times because of missing a dose. I would never change a thing. I have never felt more comfortable with who I am as I am now. I can finally see myself in the mirror and see me, Adam, not a shell.

This is my life as a trans man, and while it’s not perfect and it may be difficult to understand for people, it means the world to me. I can finally

feel comfortable in my skin, or at least start to. All because I was given the chance to take testosterone. Which, nowadays, everyone’s trying to take away from me. Laws are passed in states all over the country refusing access to hormone replacements or any healthcare that may be seen as gender-affirming care. While I understand many of the concerns involved with these new laws, there’s also a lack of understanding.

Many of these laws are being handed out and accepted without knowing the full consequences. Personally, if I was forced to stop taking testosterone because of a law that was passed and created by people who didn’t understand what it meant to me, it may as well be the end of the world. The one thing that made me feel normal would be ripped away because people didn’t understand.

When thinking about why someone may take hormone replacements, whether a cis-gendered man taking them because their hormones are low or a transgender man taking hormones as a means to create enough to be finally considered a man, there are reasons for both of them, and they are viable either way.

So... how do you make friends again?



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Childhood was the gateway to friendship; it was lined with paved roads that led you to people who had similar surface-level interests to you. You didn't need to have the same political views or even the same tastes in style, all you needed were vaguely similar interests and you would be stuck like glue until the very end of high school.

But once the graduation caps are put into storage and left to collect the dust of passing years, cars are packed with old mementos of your youthful age, goodbyes are said, tears are cried and the friends that have been a main feature in the portrait of your life have been reduced to a footnote. Where does that leave you?

Making friends as an adult feels more like an unpaved dirt road with roots sticking up across the path. Nothing feels comfortable or familiar, and no one ever tells you how hard it will be.

It's strange how almost every TV show on Earth jokes about the struggles of making adult friendships. But that's all it is: a joke. There isn't any seriousness, no dive into the fears of what this loneliness means for a person. It serves as a mirror of one's self. It's like looking upon yourself through a thousand microscopes and only seeing the most minute details, because if I can't make friends now, will I ever? The clock in my mind is ticking unstated by the fear that swirls in my head, its minutes holding the thoughts from exiting my psychic and relinquishing myself to a journey spent alone.

Maybe for some making friends is as easy as walking into a room and introducing yourself. A person with a magnetic personality has the ability

“Adulthood doesn't need to be lonely. The second that you stop trying to reach out and make connections is the moment you relinquish yourself to an isolated fate.”



Image courtesy Canva

to click into any mold presented to themselves, it's a gift that few possess and enviable to many. For those who don't present this magic ability to make friends as an adult, it feels like speaking a language you haven't yet learned the basics of. It's strange in a way: you've made friends before, how did it work then? Were you just stuck together because life saw it that way, because high school always becomes easier when you don't have to stand alone, or was life simply just easier then?

Before I came to college my biggest fear was not being able to meet and make friends, and I always got the same response when I voiced these concerns: “Just don't worry about it, people will love you, you'll find friends on the first day don't worry.” When the first day arrived I was eager to find people to spend my time with, giving myself false confidence as a way to appear approachable and likable. The moment that classes began I felt as though I had missed my moment; people around me were pairing off. I had decided a

few times to maybe join others at lunch sporadically but the fear of what they would say after I left kept me from making true to this promise.

After a few weeks, I deemed that perhaps it was just that making friends was hard for everyone. I reached out to others, people from my past that I was desperate to cling close to, and asked about their process. To my sadness, they had all found like-minded people easily.

Why was it that everyone in the world was able to move past the anxieties of beginning friendships? Was it me? Did I come off peculiarly? Was my overeagerness to be noticed by anyone obvious and pushed anyone away from wanting to associate with me? I gave up hope not long after allowing my time to be spent alone instead.

Here's where the truth comes in. Being alone will never quite be as great as surrounding yourself with those that make you happy. No, it won't happen in a week but that doesn't mean that it never will.

Yes, the road seems treacherous and rocky with its unpaved uneasiness. Past that rough terrain is a road that might not be as pretty and smoothly rolling as the day of your youth, but it still leads to the joy that can only be achieved through the gift of the company of others.

Get involved, join random clubs, and follow your instincts. Escape the bubble of your lonely world and follow the road to a beginning.

Need a peaceful place to study? Check these spots

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Top: A patio outside Building 2 and seating inside Building 1.
Middle: Hallway between Building 2 and 3W, Outside Building 1, and the Building 6 Cafe
Bottom: Seating by Ankeny Lake

