

Palisades Views



Volume XXXX No. 6

June 2011

Mechanic puts a charge into wife's commute

By Teri Maddox
Belleville News-Democrat

Susan Czerwinski takes a bit of a risk every time she leaves for work in the morning.

The Dorsey woman drives an electric vehicle that can go only 45 miles without a battery charge. She surpassed her limit once last summer and got stranded on the road.

"I can be a little more reckless because my husband owns a tow truck," she said, laughing.

Susan, 48, is dean of math, science and technology at Lewis and Clark Community College in Godfrey.

Her husband, Scott Aljets, 59, is co-owner of Aljets Automotive in Dorsey and Staunton.

Last year, he removed the internal combustion (gasoline) engine from her 1996 Chevy S10 truck and replaced it with an electric motor and 24 golf-cart batteries.

"It's not a hybrid," he said. "It's 100 percent electric."

Electric cars and trucks are considered more environmentally friendly than gas-powered vehicles because they use less energy and emit no carbon dioxide or pollutants.

Susan can drive for about a penny a mile, saving big on commuting costs. She also is leading by example as part of Lewis and Clark's push toward sustainability.

"We've examined our

carbon footprint, and we've found that transportation is our biggest impact on the environment," she said.

The college is installing electric vehicle-charging stations on its Godfrey and Edwardsville cam-



Steve Nagy/BND

Scott Aljets and Susan Czerwinski

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Algae biofuels could be part of solution

Alton resident Daniel Burton will speak on "Algae Biofuels: A Viable Economic and Sustainable Energy Source for Machinery?" at the June 13 meeting of the Piasa Palisades Group.

Burton is a senior studying biology and environmental science at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. He recently served as an intern in the Sierra Club's Alton office.

Petroleum's dwindling supply and rising prices are pushing Americans to consider alternative-energy solutions for the transportation sector. But alternatives must be economical as well as sustainable.

Burton will discuss advantages, disadvantages and current viability of alternative energies, including first- and second-generation biofuels.

Algae biofuels are the newest generation and may prove to be the quickest and most affordable way for the United States to move away from oil depend-

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Published by the Piasa Palisades Group of the Sierra Club.
Serving the Southwestern Illinois counties of
Bond, Calhoun, Fayette, Greene, Jersey, Macoupin, Madison and Montgomery.

Not much positive news on the world-food front

By **Richard C. Keating**
Group member

Some of you may remember the name of Lester R. Brown, founder of Worldwatch Institute. For years, his group published “State of the World” yearbooks that many of us used to teach environmental topics.

Brown certainly is the leading guru on the world food situation. His most recent article, “The New Geopolitics of Food,” came out in the May/June 2011 issue of Foreign Pol-

icy. If you really want to become informed on current trends, this in-depth article will make it happen.

Brown deftly weaves a narrative that includes rising food prices, diversion of grains to biofuel, lower production due to global warming, population growth (net addition of 219,000 new mouths each day), eroding soils, increasing conversion of grains to animal protein and overdrawing of water from aquifers in many regions.

In addition, wealthier emerging economies are buying up great tracts of agricultural land from poorer countries, right out from under peasants.

In the past, it was always possible for countries like ours to increase production to help other countries facing food crises. We’ve reached a stage where “and then a miracle occurred ...” will probably not be enough, but it’s the only positive spin I can offer.

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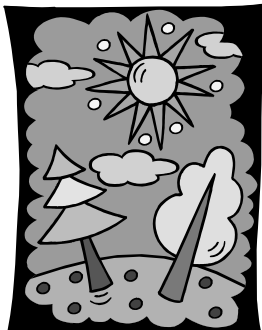
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JUNE CALENDAR

Friday, June 10 Piasa Palisades Group monthly bike ride. Leisurely, 10-mile loop with some hills on the Heritage, Goshen and Nickel Plate trails. Meet at 6 p.m. in the first parking lot at Miner's Park, off South Main near the covered bridge in Glen Carbon. Google N38 44.947 W89 58.996 for a map. Helmet required. For more information, contact Jim Bensman at (618) 463-0714 or jbensman1@charter.net.



In case of questionable weather, call if you are not on the outings listserv.

Monday, June 13 Piasa Palisades Group monthly meeting. Sierra Club intern Daniel Burton, a biology and environmental science student, will speak (see related article). Meet at 7:30 p.m. at First Unitarian Church, Third and Alby streets in Alton. Pre-meeting dinner at 5:45 p.m. at Bossanova. For more information, call (618) 462-6802.

Wednesday June 15 Piasa Palisades Group monthly moonlight hike. Details will be posted on the website and outings listserv.

NON-SIERRA CLUB ACTIVITIES

Tuesdays and Thursdays, June 7-23 Wade into Wetlands! at Watershed Nature Center in Edwardsville. Summer camp for kids entering fourth or fifth grades. Get up close with wetland-dwelling plants and animals. Learn about aquatic creatures by dip-netting and identifying

your catch with microscopes. Cooperative program with University of Illinois Extension. Hours are 9 to 11 a.m. Cost is \$30 for 4-H members or \$50 for non-members. Limited space. Register by June 1. Mail a check to University of Illinois Extension, P.O. Box 427, Edwardsville, IL 62025 or register online at www.extension.uiuc.edu/madisonstclair.

Saturday, June 18 Summer solstice celebration

at La Vista Ecological Learning Center in Godfrey. Celebrate the sun and earth, give thanks for the special gifts of each season and enjoy the camaraderie created by human beings who share delight in the natural world. Hours are 2 to 4 p.m. Bring a seasonal dessert or drink to share. Optional donation. For more information, call (618) 466-5004.

Saturday, June 18 Native prairie plant sale at The Nature Institute in Godfrey. Fourth-annual event. Hours are 9 a.m. to noon in the greenhouse near Talahi Lodge. Prices range from \$1 per plant to \$10 per six pack. For more information, call (618) 466-9930.

Saturday, June 18 Concert, barbecue and art exhibit at The Nature Institute in Godfrey. "In Harmony with Nature" will feature the Alton Symphony Orchestra and artist Rip Kastaris. Hours are 4 to 8 p.m. at Olin Nature Preserve, within walking distance of Talahi Lodge. Music starts at 7 p.m. Cost is \$30. Only 400 tickets will be sold. Bring lawn chairs. No coolers. Drinks

available. For more information, call (618) 466-9930.

Saturday, June 25 Reptiles and amphibians program at Watershed Nature Center in Edwardsville. Hours are 10 a.m. to noon. For more information, call (618) 692-7578.

Saturday, June 25 Herb workshop series at La Vista Ecological Learning Center in Godfrey. The last session is "Creating an Outdoor Wood-Fire Grill and Cooking with Culinary Herbs." Taught by Crystal Moore-Stevens and Eric Stevens, farmers at the Community Supported Garden at La Vista. Learn how to cook with herbs and make rosemary flatbreads, herb-infused oils and vinegars and a meal in a Dutch oven. Hours are 1 to 5 p.m. Cost is \$35. For more information, call (618) 466-9930.

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Palisades Views

is a monthly publication for and about Sierra Club members.

To submit a newsletter item:
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DEADLINE FOR JULY:
SATURDAY, JUNE 25



CHARGE

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pusés this spring.

"Green" goals also are guiding operations, services and curriculums.

"I'm over the automotive technology department, and we're increasing electric-hybrid training and the use of alternative fuels," Susan said.

Susan and Scott live in Dorsey, a tiny town north of Edwardsville. They have a blended family that includes his three grown children and her four sons.

Scott and his siblings run the family business, Aljets Automotive, founded by their father, Frederick, in 1949.

"I never wanted a hobby that had to do with cars since I did it for a living," Scott said.

"But I was intrigued by the idea of electric vehicles."

Scott began doing Internet research on gas-to-electric conversions three years ago and bought the compact S10 to conduct his own experiment.

Small vehicles work well for conversions because they're relatively light. Trucks have the added benefit of weight-bearing capacity and exterior space for batteries.

Scott opted to use a kit that came with an electric motor and other parts. He also bought 24 golf-cart batteries.

Small vehicles work well for conversions because they're relatively light. Trucks have the added benefit of weight-bearing capacity and exterior space for batteries. Scott opted to use a kit that came with an electric motor and other parts. He also bought 24 golf-car batteries.

"My goal was to go 45 miles (between charges)," he said. "That's right at the far edge of this technology. That's about all the batteries you can carry."

Each battery weighs 75 pounds. Scott squeezed in three where the truck's radiator used to be (it's no longer needed to cool the gas engine) and built a frame under the bed for the other 21.

He figured the 45-mile limit would allow Susan to drive from Dorsey to Godfrey to Edwardsville, where her sons attend school, and back home.

She takes a different vehicle if planning a major detour.

"I have to think about things," she said. "I have to

think about what I need to do, where I need to go after work. I plan my days better."

The truck's battery charger is hidden in the bed. Susan plugs it into a 220-volt electrical outlet every night. A full charge takes five hours.

One day last summer, Susan left the house not knowing the batteries were only partially charged because of a power outage the night before. She broke down on Homer Adams Parkway in Alton.

"Luckily, it was warmer," she said. "I was able to sit and wait for

Scott to come and get me (in the wrecker)."

Another day, Susan just drove too far. She pulled over, let the batteries self-charge and limped the rest of the way home at 5 to 10 mph.

The truck has a volt meter instead of a gas gauge to show remaining battery power. It also has heat and air conditioning.

"It doesn't have power steering," Susan said. "So I've had to bulk up."

The truck looks no different than any other S10, except a message on the doors reads, "Caution: 144 Volts DC."

Scott is a volunteer firefighter, and he wanted to warn emergency personnel of possible danger in an accident.

Scott spent about \$12,000 on the conversion, including the kit, other parts and batteries. He figures labor at 250 hours over five months.

"I designed it knowing that people were going to be looking at it," he said. "It's what I do for a living, so I wanted to do it right."

NOTICE

Piasa Palisades Group members are welcome to join two committees to help the environmental cause.

The Environmental Recycling Subcommittee of the Awakening the Dreamer Conference is working to get recycle bins to parishioners and members of United Congregations of Metro East churches in Alton by the end of June.

The Ethical Eating Subcommittee of the Awakening the Dreamer Conference is organizing an Ethical Eating Workshop and Tasting in July. Many volunteers are needed. Come lend a hand!

Organic garden is open to the community

By Virginia Woulfe-Beile
ExCom member

The Community Cultivators welcome groups of all ages to the Discovery Garden at La Vista Park in Godfrey.

The 1-acre organic garden at 2421 W. Delmar Ave. was established in 2002 to teach the community about natural food sources.

Today, it provides tangible learning experiences, fosters an appreciation of nature, increases the public's "earth literacy" and hosts alternative, creative outdoor activities.

Teachers and youth leaders with traditional classrooms, home schools, day-care centers, scouting groups, sports teams and churches can schedule two-hour sessions for five to 30 students.

Sessions can be tailored to class or group needs, focusing on concepts and skills that compliment curriculums.



Adult workshops are open to community groups, professional associations, colleges, senior centers and others. Topics range from herbs to canning, vermin-posting to landscaping for energy efficiency.

Registration fees vary. Youth groups are asked to donate a minimum of \$3 per child. Workshops are scheduled on Thursdays through the season or by arrangement.

The garden is handicapped-accessible and otherwise compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Please advise our staff of your needs.

Ten percent of the garden's harvest goes to local food centers and other charities as part of the Community Cultivators mission.

The public also can purchase its organic produce at the Alton Farmers' and Artisans' Market from 8 a.m. to noon on Saturdays June through mid-October.

The garden provides many opportunities for the community to be involved:

VOLUNTEERING — We're always looking for energetic people who want to contribute to local culture.

MENTORING — Help children learn about the joys of gardening.

FARMING — Adults are invited to till, plant, weed, harvest and assist with other chores.

FUNDRAISING — Got any creative ideas for fundraising activities?

Join us for Yoga at the Garden on June 16 and Hoop'n (Hula) it Up on July 14. For more information on public activities and volunteer opportunities at the Discovery Garden, call Virginia Woulfe-Beile at (618) 977-2319 or Jaime Hine at (618) 772-6315.

**EXPLORE,
ENJOY
AND
PROTECT
THE
PLANET**

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Family Fishing Fair — 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. June 11 at Pere Marquette State Park, near Grafton. Educate on invasive fish species and help with fun art project using recycled and reused materials. Two-hour shifts.

Hampton Place Picnic — 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. June 24 at Hellrung Park in Alton. Educate on solar energy and the importance of eating locally produced food. Two-hour shifts.

Classic Car Show — 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. June 25 in downtown

Alton. Educate on hybrid vehicles and help with event recycling. Two-hour shifts.

Alternative Energy Day — 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. July 24 in Edwardsville. Help in advance with organizing, contacting vendors and hanging up flyers and educate on alternative energy at the event.

Ethical Eating Workshop and Tasting — 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. July 30 in Alton. Help in advance with contacting vendors and hanging up flyers and educate on local food issues at the event.

Group steps up efforts to raise funds

By Virginia Woulfe-Beile
ExCom member

Fundraising is necessary for most non-profit organization to fulfill their missions. Funds raised by the Piasa Palisades Group have helped members educate the community on environmental issues and influence public policy.

The group was founded in 1972. In the past 39 years, dedicated volunteers have spearheaded hugely successful fundraising efforts.

They've also achieved important goals, supporting the "bottle bill" initiative on beverage deposits, fighting for Lock and Dam 26 mitigation and preventing commercial logging in Pere Marquette State Park, near Grafton.

One of the group's most successful fundraising efforts was a lemonade stand at the VP Fair in St. Louis. Members have sold bird seed, blue-



bird houses, calendars, coffee and tea, as well as hot chocolate at the Alton Halloween Parade.

And who could forget the awesome Sierra Club belt buckle? A true iconic keepsake for any one lucky enough to own one!

The Piasa Palisades Group Executive Committee is redoubling its fundraising efforts to support projects and programs on clean-energy alternatives, ethical eating, middle and high school environmental education and scholarships for children to attend The Nature Institute's Discovery Day Camp.

In addition to current activities, we are planning a wine tasting in the fall of 2011 and a trivia night in early 2012.

We would greatly appreciate input from those with experience, expertise or advice on organizing such events, including suggestions on a possible trivia venue.

Anyone interested in serving on the group's fundraising committee or just offering ideas should contact Fundraising Chair Virginia Woulfe-Beile at (618) 977-2319 or send an e-mail to coexist1221@aol.com.

CALENDAR —

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mation, call (618) 466-5004.

NOTE: The Sierra Club is not sponsoring or administering the above activities and cannot vouch for their quality, safety, planning, supervision or management. Information is being provided because it may be of interest to members.

WELCOME

Two new interns are working in the Sierra Club's Alton office this summer:

Stephanie Juen, a law student at Georgetown University Law Center in Washington, D.C., who will address coal issues; and Alvin Harper, a graduate student in environmental sciences at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, who will tackle several other campaigns.

WANTED

Could you spare two hours a month for a good cause? We need more volunteers to fold newsletters and stuff envelopes to prepare for Palisades Views mailings.

Hours are about 10 a.m. to noon one Thursday a month in the Alton office. It's fun! For more information, call Carole Massalone at (618) 462-0288.

ALGAE —

Continued from page 1

ence. Burton thinks large-scale development could be revolutionary.

Burton plans to continue his education by earning master's and doctorate degrees. One of his goals is to work in research and development for the U.S. Department of Energy.

"My ultimate dream is to see the United States produce and distribute a sustainable and economical fuel source," he said.

The meeting will be held at 7:30 p.m. Monday, June 13, at the First Unitarian Church, 110 E. Third St. in Alton. Everyone is invited to join us for a pre-meeting dinner at 5:45 p.m. at Bossanova, 112 W. Third St. in Alton.

NOTICE

More than 30 members of the Piasa Palisades Group have signed up to receive news stories, announcements and action requests on local and regional environmental issues through its new e-mail alert system!

Why not join the crowd? You always can unsubscribe later.

Send your name and e-mail address to Piasa Palisades Group Executive Committee member Chris Krusa at clkrusa@charter.net.

For more information, call him at (618) 288-2681 (home) or (410) 490-5024 (cell).