

Nature Trails

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Native Freshwater Mussels in the Pacific Northwest

Shelly Miller

**Project Leader, Coastal Chinook Research and Monitoring Program,
Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Corvallis, Oregon**

**Friday, 20 February 2015, 7:30pm, Room 100
Willamette Hall, UO Campus**

At the end of our interview our speaker, Shelly Miller, gave me a pamphlet entitled *Freshwater Mussels of the Pacific Northwest*, published by The Xerces Society in 2009. It's a lovely thing. Did you know several mussel species live over 50 years, and one species can live for over 200 years? That you count their growth rings to get their age? That during their lives they filter prodigious volumes of fresh water? That there are 297 species in North America and that the U.S. is the center of freshwater mussel biodiversity for the entire world? That their larvae hitch a ride on a fish to get to new digs? I am once again humbled by the discovery of yet one more area of my ignorance. I knew nothing about these interesting and important animals. The pamphlet, which will be available at Miller's talk, is authored by E. J. Nedeau, A. K. Smith, J. Stone, and S. Jepsen. It is available from The Xerces Society, or you can download it at

<http://www.xerces.org/publications/identification-guides/freshwater-mussel-guide/>.

Miller grew up in Ohio, close to Lake Erie, where through activities with her parents she gained an early affinity for water and an appreciation for the outdoors. In our interview Miller volunteered that she played clarinet in her high school marching band. For those of you at our January meeting this little tidbit has special meaning. Implied in it is that she *doesn't* play bass guitar in a rock band. The quip also is a good example of her quiet, quirky sense of humor. Miller got an early introduction to the Pacific Northwest through visits to her grandmother in Edmonds, Washington. One thing she got to do on those visits was fish for salmon, so it seems particularly fitting that in her present position she leads the Coastal Chinook Research and Monitoring Program.

Miller initially thought she wanted to be a medical doctor and so began her academic training as a pre-med student at Washington and Jefferson College, in Washington, Pennsylvania. W&J has an excellent reputation for placing its graduates in medical schools, but the cutthroat attitude among her fellow students, which extended even to sabotage of lab exams and stealing documents meant to be available to all, led her to question her desire to become a doctor. In her second semester her general biology professor opened her eyes to the possibility of field biology as an alternative career choice. She transferred to the College of William and Mary, in Williamsburg, Virginia, and graduated with a degree in biology. From there she headed back to Pennsylvania, finishing her master's degree in ecology and evolution at the University of Pittsburgh. She chose Pitt so she could work with Margaret

Welzbach, a behavioral ecologist. In her thesis research she focused on competition among species of darters – small fish related to perch and walleye. It was at Pitt that Miller was first exposed to freshwater mussels – in a paleo-ecology class.

Miller's first real job was a three-year stint with the West Virginia Department of Natural Resources. She mentioned two important things that happened to her in West Virginia: she got the mussel bug and she met Dean Walton. Her first study of mussels involved putting them in cages in various streams and seeing how they survived in streams polluted with acid mine drainage and how they responded to the treatment of the acidic water. Miller next worked for The Nature Conservancy in Illinois, doing conservation planning. She carried out habitat classification and threats assessments for fish and other organisms in the Illinois River basin. After 18 months with TNC she and Walton married, so her study of him continues. They moved to Virginia, where Miller worked for the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. Among other duties she was the technical team leader for that state's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy.

Oregon made the couple's short list when they began searching for a place where both could have meaningful careers. In 2005 Miller took a position with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and is now the project leader for the Department's Coastal Chinook Research and Monitoring Program. She manages multiple projects and associated staff, providing data to inform international fisheries management through the Pacific Salmon Treaty process. Miller has also chaired the Pacific Northwest Native Freshwater Mussel Workgroup but has recently stepped down from that administrative post. This Workgroup strives to increase awareness of freshwater mussels among natural resource professionals and the public and advocates for actions that support the conservation and appropriate management of freshwater mussels. She told me that although her primary duties involve salmon she



Miller and daughter. Note tiny mussel.

remains a champion of the less glamorous underdog species – things like darters and mussels. Perhaps this stems from herself being an underdog “band geek” in high school.

We need to know more about freshwater mussels for several reasons. They are indicators of water quality and quantity. They are being examined as possible natural filters of wastewater. They decrease water turbidity. And they are threatened: in North America, approximately 70% of all freshwater mussel species are extinct, imperiled, or vulnerable to extinction. They are one of the most at-risk groups of all animals in our country. Their decline has been studied in eastern North America, but little is known about them in western states. Oregon has six species. Miller will tell us about their natural history, their uses by Native Americans and others, their natural predators, their reproductive strategies, and the multiple threats to their continued existence. Please join us on 20 February at 7:30pm in room 100 Willamette Hall on the U of O campus to hear Shelly Miller’s talk: “Native Freshwater Mussels in the Pacific Northwest.” John Carter



Two discoveries, excerpted from *To the Woods*, a tale of fifteen years “camping.” By Evelyn Hess

Stardust

I like to walk at night on our property or up the road, and I prefer not to use a flashlight whose big glowing circle limits my eyes and my mind to the confines of its halo. I want to see trees and night birds silhouetted against the sky. I want to see clouds and stars and moon. I want to see the night.

I have taken some spectacular spills, walking in the dark. Several times I’ve strayed from the path into brambles or the ditch. Once I slammed my toe into the butt end of a log and crashed down hard on the log pile. That convinced me to carry a flashlight, but to leave it tucked in my pocket, to use only in case of dire emergency.

But before I began carrying lights, I took a walk to the pond on a moonless fall night. As dark as it was, the gnarly oak branches and shaggy forms of Douglas firs were darker still against the night sky. Beyond them, the stars shone with an intense brilliance. I walked gazing at the sky, marveling at the spectacle, until I had to drop my eyes to the ground to relax my cramped neck. Much to my astonishment, there on the ground I saw another star. I gasped at its radiance. Initially I thought this glittering object was reflecting light from another source, but there was no light anywhere to be reflected. Incredibly, to me it looked

exactly like a tiny fallen star. And then I found another, and another. Surely Tinkerbell had floated through, scattering stardust along my path. As my excitement built, my curiosity swelled along with it. I couldn’t imagine what sort of wonderland I had stumbled into.

I was surrounded by minute dazzling dots, glimmering embers glowing not red, but silver. “White hot,” I remembered from childhood, is much hotter than “red hot.” I was sure I would be burned if I touched one, but I had to discover the reality of these twinkling mysteries. Finally I screwed up the courage to pick one up, scooping a good handful of forest duff beneath it to protect my hand. To my surprise, I felt no heat, but the gleam remained constant. Having many times singed my fingers on incandescent light bulbs, I thought our engineers could learn a lot from whatever I was carrying: imagine such brilliance without energy being lost to heat!

Nearly hyperventilating, I rushed my treasure into the trailer. Once under the lantern light, the starlight was extinguished. I was amazed to see, cupped in my hand, a brownish, half-inch long worm. This had to be a glowworm, but in all of the years I had lived around here, I’d never before seen one. I always understood glowworms to be the larval form of fireflies (which are actually beetles, not flies) but we don’t have fireflies out here, so the mystery needed further solving.

With the help of an Oregon State University entomologist I learned that, though we indeed do not have fireflies in Oregon, we do have glowworms. This is a different species from the winged beetles that light the nights elsewhere. Here the larvae glow, and the female, who retains the larval form even after reaching reproductive maturity, continues to be



luminescent. Adult males, not surprisingly, are attracted to light and in their beetle form, fly to the side of the flashing female. Different species of glowworms send different patterns of light, and sometimes a female, hungry less for sex than for

nourishment, will signal a “foreign” male, and when he comes courting, he becomes her dinner. (Which may be only a good story. References I’ve read more recently say adults may not eat at all.)

I felt particularly fortunate in finding my path star-strewn. Glowworms are uncommon here and becoming more so as land is developed and pesticides become more prevalent. I was delighted to discover that some glowworms are predators of slugs and snails. Exotic gastropods, particularly the European brown garden snail, which was introduced to California by an enterprising chef dreaming of a fortune in escargot, are the ruin of many of my nursery plants. So now I’ve been introduced to a helper—and another reason, besides protection of the birds, reptiles, and mammals, for not using toxic slug bait. After all, who would want to snuff out the stardust?

Potting nursery plants

One mid-January day I was attacking the soil pile, digging deep to find loose material well below the two-inch frozen crust, when out rolled a furry golden lump somewhat bigger than a tennis ball, its head tucked into its belly, over-sized hind feet cradling its head, long tail circling in three concentric rings. Worried that I might have hurt it in my vicious stabbing of the pile, I held it in my gloved hand to check for damage, but found only a spot of mussed fur. I saw no sign of breathing, nor did I see any sign of fear. It didn’t appear to be feigning death. The little creature looked fat and healthy but apparently was in a deep torpor, and I had removed it from its winter burrow. With a lot of potting ahead, I would be decimating the pile, so it couldn’t go back there. Finally, I decided to include the little guy in my potting. I put soil and moss in a gallon pot and placed the sleeping fur ball gently on top. I snuggled a moss blanket around it and added another thick layer of soil. Then I tucked the pot under the edge of a tarp and crossed my fingers.

It turned out this was a Pacific jumping mouse, *Zapus trinotatus*, “zapus” meaning “big foot.” Its four-inch body can have a tail more than five and a half inches long. Using its long tail for balance, it is able to jump to four feet high, pushing off with its *zapuses*. As it leaps from side to side, it is sometimes mistaken for a frog. The jumping mouse is the lone hibernator among all of our mice and voles, remaining in a deep sleep for more than half the year. One reference says that it lowers its body temperature to two degrees Celsius for the duration, after doubling its body weight in preparation for the long snooze.

I had only recently discovered that the Pacific Northwest was home to jumping mice. One summer day I was cleaning up in front of the trailer and picked up a piece of wood with an unusual furry black fungus (I thought) on it. It wasn’t one I had seen before, so I looked more closely and realized it was breathing, and it had two heads. The book says they’re born hairless, with eyes still closed and ears folded. So these furry fellows, scrunched tightly side by side, were not brand new, but were certainly very young—less than a month, from what I read. I asked David if he had seen them. He said, “Oh. You mean that black fungus?”



The Pacific jumping mouse is described as having an olive to nearly black back and orange-

ish sides, with the fur getting lighter before hibernation. From my limited observation, I would guess that their baby fur is darker to make them less conspicuous and, in my little potted friend at least, very little dark fur is apparent during the winter sleep.



A Culinary History

by Reida Kimmel

I recently acquired a worn notebook written in my grandmother’s hand, containing menu plans for the first half of 1911. I never knew my grandparents, but I knew enough about their lives to entertain certain expectations about the contents of that book. My grandfather, ‘Pa’, born shortly before the Civil War, grew up on a farm. His two older brothers started a small mill manufacturing quilts. Pa joined the business, but making ‘comforters’ was not satisfying enough. He travelled around in a wagon with a young cabinetmaker named Israel Sack. They bought old junk furniture from the farmers in Connecticut and Rhode Island, cleaned it up and sold it. Today we call that ‘junk’ priceless Americana, Chippendale, Queen Anne, and Pilgrim Century furniture. Early in the twentieth century, the affluent were just beginning to appreciate the beauty and rarity of American antiques. The family business that Israel started in 1905 came to be the nation’s most respected and pricey antique shop. My grandfather became wealthy, but he remained in New London, Connecticut, where

he built 'Westomere', a large Arts and Crafts style house on spacious grounds. Here he displayed and sold his antiques. His wife Neva Ffenno, 'Ma', was the daughter of an innkeeper in the Finger Lakes region of New York. She was a dark and handsome woman of suitably operatic proportions, who gave up her singing career to become the second wife of a much older man. They had three daughters, Neva my mother, Janna, and baby Priscilla. Mother remembered that there were servants, including a gardener. She adored her father, an affable man, fond of pie for breakfast. Every year, Grandfather Ffenno visited, and he and Pa went off in the wagon buying chickens to ship to New York State for the restaurant. "The best chickens come from Connecticut"; they said. After the girls were grown, Pa and Ma sold Westomere and moved to a smaller place near the shore. The house was torn down during the Depression, and replaced with a block of modest homes.

Did this nouveau riche couple entertain and feast lavishly? No, for the most part, they clung to their culinary roots. New Years Day, page one, and they are having baked beans, brown bread, and bacon. Those baked beans are still a family favorite, though we have them for dinner. Brown bread was Grandfather Ffenno's specialty, a soda bread, made with whole-wheat flour, which was not in common use in those days. The family ate meat, chicken or fish at every meal, and as spring arrived, shellfish, including lobster. Potatoes and surprisingly, sweet potatoes, figured prominently. Many dishes were creamed. Broth was popular to start a dinner. Janna and Baby drank a lot of broth, while Neva got few vegetables and lots of chops and potatoes. Ma planned three meals a day, no lavish teas or appetizers. 'Dinner' was the midday meal with 'supper' in the evening. Leftovers were used and used again. Boiled dinner became cold corned beef and then corned beef hash. Steak reappeared as hash or pie. My mother taught me two rules for cooking: "Nothing wasted." "Everything made from scratch." Now I know where she learned those lessons.

The family could afford anything that was available, but in winter they ate winter vegetables, beets, parsnips, carrots, celery and turnips. The beans, peas, asparagus, corn and lima beans on the menus were probably canned, as were the tomatoes. My 1913 edition of *Fanny Farmer's Boston Cooking School Cookbook* has clever hints for cooking with canned vegetables. Fanny tells us that though fresh beans and spinach are available all year, they are not good. The Palmers ate fruit and vegetables at every meal, salads of celery and apples, applesauce, baked apples, stewed tomatoes. How joyful they must have

been when dandelions, the first spring greens, became available in early March. Cultivated dandelion greens appeared on the menu often. Wild dandelions would not appear until late spring in New England. Did my grandparents have a greenhouse? Soon they were eating beet greens, and on April 18th "asparagus (fresh)" as well as watercress salad appeared on the dinner menu.

A century ago this upper middle class family ate an overly caloric but remarkably healthy diet in spite of the fact that food availability was limited to local food and produce shipped from market gardens a few hundred miles to the south. (Fanny Farmer mentions that produce of very dubious quality is shipped fresh from California and Florida.) Besides the pleasure of glimpsing the daily workings of a household in 1911, can we take home any lessons from these frail pages? How dissimilar are our meal planning options? Today I can go to the store and buy all sorts of fresh produce like asparagus, corn, sweet peppers, grapes, or peaches and plums, at any time of the year. But in winter these items come from Chile, Peru, Central America and Mexico. Like Fanny Farmer I can disparage their quality, but there is a greater issue at stake. Those items cost fuel to get here. Buy Peruvian asparagus or Chilean grapes and you are buying into global warming. Use restraint and wait for local asparagus and fruit and they will taste all the better for being longed for as well as fresher. We might not think of ourselves as wealthy, but we are so rich in choices, in food, in travel opportunities, in entertainment, so able to indulge ourselves, that we are really very similar to those old Palmers with their staff of servants, their lovely gardens and spoiled children. I admire the way Ma and Pa clung to their culinary roots even when they were wealthy. We can learn a bunch of lessons from them about creatively using what the season has to offer. Ma's cook had to buy local and seasonal. For us, we have to retrain ourselves to do so. That is easy here in Oregon where just about everything good can grow, except for citrus, coffee and bananas. Those, incidentally, were the sole exotic items on the Palmer winter menus.

One little lesson I have learned is to (I can hardly believe this!) plant the earliest greens. In this weirdly warm winter we are already enjoying wild bittercress and self-seeded mache. Now I am about to plant weeds, dandelion seeds, in my precious cold frame. I hope they grow fast and are lush and delicious. I do know that I won't boil them for twenty minutes before enjoying them. We youngsters know a few things too!



A Small Coastal Stream by John Carter

I head west, from Eugene or Corvallis or Grants Pass or Salem or Roseburg. Sometimes I hit 101 and turn north or south and then come back into the Coast Range from its west side. The last leg is always unpaved. In back are chains, saw, axe, shovel, tow strap, come-along. And the tools of the trade: rod, reel, flies, floats, waders, vest, belt, staff, boots, rain shell, gloves, hat. License. Water. Lunch.

The stream, magical anytime, is best seen in winter. On a rainy, windy day. Its Rhododendrons, hanging out from the bank, almost touch the water when weighed down by the rain. Cedars, firs, hemlock, spruce tower above me, their tops hidden in mist. The stream's water slides over bedrock that curves up, in places many feet above the streambed. Deep slots through this solid rock, filled with water that special

shade of green, quicken my heart: beauty and promise.

In places are gravel beds washed by slow current: magnets that pull these steel-bright fish (there must be another word – one that more closely matches their majesty) from the food-rich ocean back to the land of their birth.

A small, coastal stream: there is one left, at least, where wild fish can still live, far enough from the clear-cuts that its gravel is still free of silt, small enough to avoid the dam-builders. Why must their number continue to diminish? Are we powerless? Cannot we protect those very few that remain, and reclaim those already defiled? Is this a one-way street?

Bracing against its current, casting my fervent wish above that perfect lie, time stops: its arrow pauses in mid-flight, to fly again sometimes hours later.



Events of Interest in the Community

Lane County Audubon Society

You can access the current issue of *The Quail*, LCAS's excellent newsletter, from their website: <http://www.laneaudubon.org/>.

A summary of their upcoming monthly meeting can be found there, as well as many other interesting avian tidbits. **See the February issue of *The Quail* for a summary of the 2014 Lane County Christmas Bird Count.**

Tuesday, 24 February, 7:30pm. Bats: Our Other Amazing Winged Neighbors. Cameron Bishop will talk about the life histories, biology, and taxonomy of bats, as well as the misconceptions people often have of these fascinating mammals. 1645 High Street.

Mt. Pisgah Arboretum

Sunday, 15 February, 8:30-11am. Late Winter Bird Walk. Chris Roth and Julia Siporin will lead a bird walk intended for people with all levels of birding experience. Discover the Arboretum's avian diversity. Please bring binoculars. Option to continue the walk until noon for those who are interested. Rain or shine. Meet at the Visitor Center. \$5, Members free.

Saturday, 21 February, 10am-noon. Winter Herbal Walk. Join Sue Sierralupe on a walk through the woods to explore the botanical medicine flourishing in our backyard. Rain or shine. Meet at the Visitor Center. \$5, Members free.

Saturday, 7 March, 1-4pm. CollagePlay! Nature-Themed Mixed Media Art Class. Experiment with paper, paint, stencils and three-dimensional ephemera to create a series of nature-themed collage pieces in this workshop with Glenda Goodrich. You will learn various techniques for layering, collaging and image transfer. Beginners and experienced artists are all welcomed! \$20 members, \$25 non-members. All materials included. Pre-registration required. To register call 541-747-3817.

Friends of Buford Park and Mt. Pisgah

Monday Morning Regulars, 9am-noon. Monday Morning Regulars work on habitat restoration projects wherever they are most needed each week. Their work includes working in the native plant nursery as well as planting native species and removing invasive species around Buford Park. Contact volunteer@bufordpark.org for more information.

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9am-noon. Nursery Work. Join us for a morning or full day of planting seedlings, preparing and caring for beds, and otherwise helping out on the many tasks needed to propagate the native plant material we use for restoration projects. Meet and work at the Native Plant Nursery at Buford Park. Enter Buford Park from Seavey Loop Road. Turn LEFT after crossing the bridge and drive 1/4 mile to the nursery.

Nearby Nature Go to <http://www.nearbynature.org/events> for information on NN activities, or call 541-687-9699.

Monday, 16 February, 8:30am-3pm. February No School Day. Talons and Tweets. Discover who's tweeting in Alton Baker Park. Practice beak techniques, check out our talon collection, experiment with feathers and flight, and make a cool bird mask. Go on a bird-watching walk in the park.

Sunday, 15 February, 9:30am-12:30pm. Restoration Celebration. Contact Nearby Nature to set up a work party for your workplace, church, club, or social group. Meet on the Waterwise Garden patio. Come dressed for the weather and bring a reusable water bottle.

Saturday, 7 March, 6:30-8pm. Treefrog Tunes Nature Quest. Enjoy a treefrog tunes walk in Amazon Park! Learn about - and listen for - Pacific treefrogs with ecologists Peg Boulay and Bruce Newhouse. Meet at the Amazon Playground. Members free, non-members \$2/person or \$5/family. Pre-registration required: 541-687-9699.

Native Plant Society of Oregon, Emerald Chapter

Thursday, 19 February, 7pm. Knobcone Pine and KMX (Knobcone x Monterey Pine Cross) in Lane County. Charlene Simpson tells us about recent Lane County sightings of knobcone pine further north than previously documented. Conference Room at Lane County Mental Health. For more information call 541-349-9999.

The University of Oregon's Museum of Natural and Cultural History

Exhibit Hours: Tuesday through Sunday, 11am-5pm

Current Exhibits

- Explore Oregon: 300 million years of Northwest natural history.
- Site Seeing: Snapshots of Historical Archaeology in Oregon.
- Oregon - Where Past is Present. 15,000 years of Northwest cultural history and 200 million years of geology.
- Highlights of the Jensen Arctic Collection.
- Tradition Keepers – Shayleen Macy. Artist Shayleen Macy is a Wasco/Yakima/Warm Springs member of the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs and a graduate of the University of Oregon's BFA program.

Ideas on Tap. First Wednesday of the Month, 7-9pm at Sam Bond's Brewing Co., 540 E 8th Ave. Quench your thirst - for beer and for knowledge – at **Ideas on Tap**. Enjoy local craft beers and thought-provoking discussions about science, ecology, history, and more. Admission is free, food and drink available for purchase.

WREN (Willamette Resources and Educational Network)

Thursday, 19 February, 3:30-5pm. WREN's Winter Volunteer Orientation Meet & Greet. WREN is currently seeking volunteers: Wetland Educators/Guides (no experience necessary), Bookkeeper, Citizen Scientists, Curriculum/Education Materials Developers, Board Members, and Grant Writers. Unpaid internships are available to college and university students. Join us to learn more! Meet at the Red House, 751 S. Danebo Ave. Light refreshments will be offered. Preregistration is required. For more information and to register: susanna@wewetlands.org or 5451-338-7046. Free.

In honor of the late Evelyn McConnaughey, beloved member of ENHS, we will be traveling to the coast near Yachats on 22 March to clean up the mile of shoreline she and her husband watched over for years. After our work is done we will tour the Ten Mile Creek Sanctuary, led by Paul Engelmeyer, our March speaker, who has managed the Sanctuary since 1991. More details will appear in March. Please join us.

Our annual field trip this year will be to the **Oregon Institute of Marine Biology**, on the weekend of 6-7 June. More details to follow.

ENHS OFFICERS AND BOARD MEMBERS 2014-2015

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ENHS Schedule of Speakers and Topics for 2014-2015

20 Feb. 2015 – Shelly Miller – Native Freshwater Mussels in the Pacific Northwest

20 Mar. 2015 – Paul Engelmeyer – Conservation Strategies: Seabirds and Forage Fish

17 April 2015 – Marli Miller – Roadside Geology of Oregon: Some Highlights

15 May 2015 – Pat Ormsbee – Wings in the Night: A Glimpse into the Mysterious World of Bats

ENHS welcomes new members! To join, fill out the form below. Membership payments allow us to give modest honoraria to our speakers, as well as to pay for the publication and mailing of *Nature Trails*. Our web address: <http://biology.uoregon.edu/enhs>

MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State & Zip _____ Phone _____

E-mail (if you want to receive announcements) _____

I (we) prefer electronic copies of NT rather than paper copies. ___ Yes ___ No

If yes, email address (if different from the one above): _____

ANNUAL DUES:	Contributing	20.00
	Family	15.00
	Individual	10.00
	Life Membership	300.00
	Contribution	_____

Annual dues for renewing members are payable in September. Memberships run from September to September. Generosity is encouraged and appreciated.

Make checks payable to: The Eugene Natural History Society
P.O. Box 5494, Eugene OR 97405

The following information is voluntary, but appreciated:

Would you like to: ___ lead field trips ___ teach informal classes ___ work on committees ___

What would you like to hear a talk on? _____

Do you have special experience in natural history: _____

On 18 January six ENHS members spent several hours pulling up invasive ivy and chopping out blackberries at Alton Baker Park. We worked in conjunction with Nearby Nature. The day was perfect: warm and sunny. We had fun while accomplishing a lot of habitat restoration. Thanks to Connie Berglund, Bitty Roy, Tom Titus, Chuck and Reida Kimmel, and Dave Wagner, our organizer, for a job well done!