

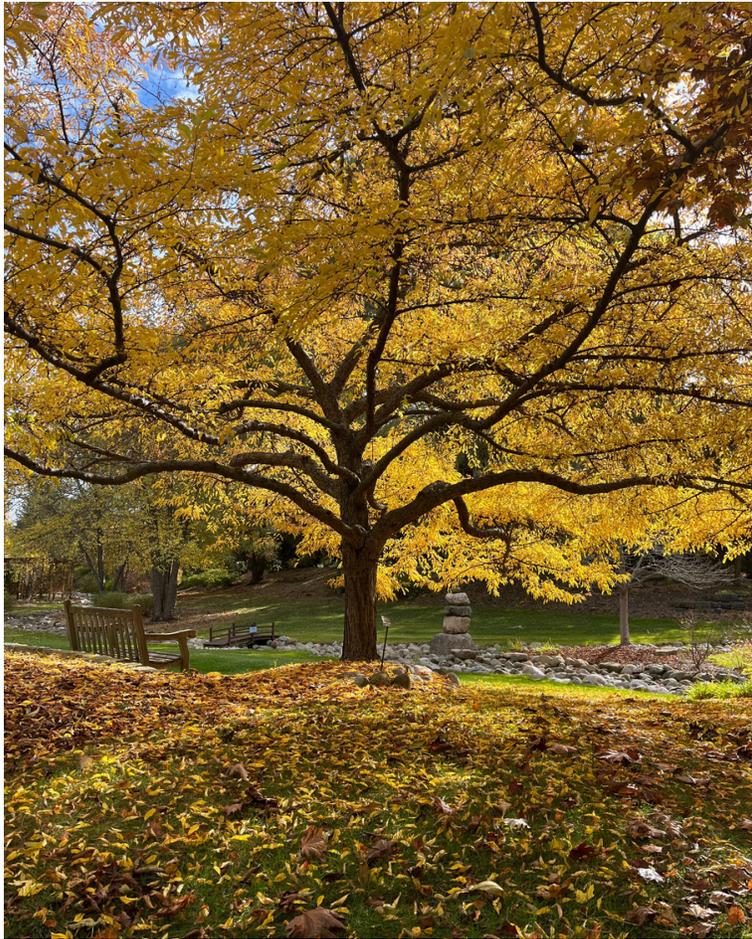
GROW-ZONE

A Quarterly Journal Review of our Seasons

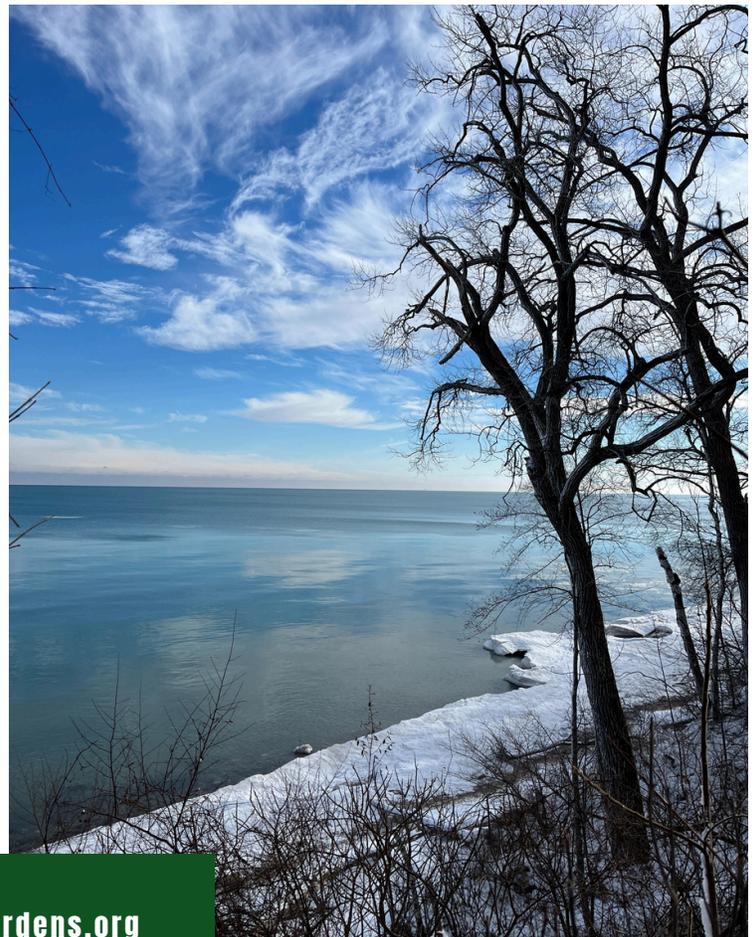
VOLUME 4 | ISSUE 1

NOVEMBER 2025 - JANUARY 2026

Fall Leaves to Winter Flurries



This season's transitions have been quite different compared to the previous year! The warm temperatures felt during our autumn days seemed to keep the leaves on the trees for a few extra weeks this year, and the colors seen throughout the gardens were stunning. Migrating bird species seemed to linger a little longer by the lakeshore, taking advantage of the mild temperatures - no need to rush down south this year! Our garden staff had also been enjoying the extra sunny days in November. Many of them continued working on various outdoor projects until right before Thanksgiving, when the weather began to switch.



Before you knew it, we had over a foot of snow on the ground by early December, and the warm autumnal breezes had abruptly changed over to howling winter winds. We all happily commented that the new trees and shrubs would have good snow cover to insulate them this winter, but we may have spoken too soon! By Christmas, temperatures had risen again, and nearly all of the snow had melted. Soon after the snow melt, a cold front from the arctic had blown our way, knocking wind chills down to -40 along the lakeshore. Living in Wisconsin sure builds resilience!

Bluebird Trail Workday

In mid-November, a number of volunteers from the local Sheboygan County Cancer Care Fund's "Survive, Thrive & Be Fit" group gathered to clean out the old nests from the past season. The team also went over the season's data, and though there were not as many bluebirds along the trail this year, everyone had positive remarks regarding the project. Volunteers that monitor the bluebird trail expressed their value of their time to enjoy nature while walking the gardens. All were very hopeful about next year, especially upon hearing that it had been a hard year for bluebirds across the state. They got their workday in just before the birdhouses got covered with snow the following week!



Honeybee Upgrades

Cleaning out the Observational Beehive in late October lent itself to a bonus honey harvest in early November. Nearly two gallons of honey were jarred up, and several frames of honey were frozen, with the intention of saving them to boost our remaining hives in spring. We also purchased a thermal imaging reader to aid us in monitoring our bees during the winter. This device detects hidden heat signatures, which can give us insight on hive health without having to open the hive, and risk losing all of their internal heat.

Lake Michigan Migrators



We are lucky to have our botanical gardens positioned right in the middle of the Mississippi Flyway, one of the four main migratory paths in North America. In tandem, being so close to Lake Michigan allows us views such as this one to the right; large groups of migratory waterfowl often cling close to the lake for its naturally increased abundance of food. Canadian geese, loons, swans, mergansers and other varieties of ducks are seen bobbing below the lake bluffs frequently during the fall and spring seasons. This flock of geese includes one white swan; it is common to see a combination of waterfowl species migrating together in this way.



Spreading Christmas Cheer

The month of December marks a time of dormancy for the plant life in the gardens, but the Christmas spirit is anything but dormant! Each year, we kick off the holidays by sharing our Siegl Santa Collection with a local community organization. This year, the collection of ornately carved wooden Santas were featured in a display case in the lobby of the Sharon S. Richardson Community Hospice. These Santas were a labor of love, hand-carved by James V. Siegl and painted by his wife Helene Y. Siegl. When James passed in 2014, Helene and the Siegl family wished to keep the collection in Sheboygan County for friends and neighbors to enjoy for years to come. Each December, the collection leaves its place in our museum to bring joy to the local community. The photo to the right shows Andrew Miller, our Transportation Museum Archivist, setting up the annual display to be enjoyed by hospice patients and their visiting families over the holiday season.



St. Nick's Luncheon @ Fresh Meals on Wheels of Sheboygan



On the first Saturday of December, Mr. Christopher donated a luncheon, offered to a number of the Fresh Meals on Wheels of Sheboygan County's clients and their guests. Farm staff have the opportunity to volunteer as servers for this wonderful event each year. Everyone enjoys getting to spend time with their coworkers and friends while giving some love back to the community. Chef Paul Smitala and his team prepared an excellent lunch of potato crusted sea bass and scrambled eggs benedict this year.



Happy Birthday Jay!

Mr. Jay W. Christopher turned 82 years young on January 21st 2026. He has spent the last year keeping busy with adding new plants and trees to his botanical gardens, updating his Transportation Museum with a new building addition, and spending time with visiting family, friends and colleagues. Jay is pictured here with two of his friends, Allison Laine Thompson, CEO of Fresh Meals On Wheels, and Erika Lusthoff, Executive Director of The Christopher Farm & Gardens, as they enjoyed the St. Nick's Luncheon on December 6th, 2025.

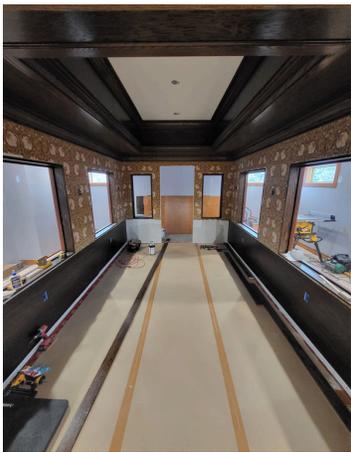


Transportation Museum Addition Update

The month of January saw a great deal of progress on the Transportation Museum's new addition. The new display rooms are really beginning to take shape! On the upper level, multiple walk-through cubicles are being fitted with flooring and wallpaper. These displays rooms will give visiting guests a historical feel of the railroad riding era, where they can view a dining car, featuring four fully furnished tables, along with an observation car with a rear platform, and a railway ticketing booth. In the lower level,



will be a small library area in the basement, stacked with books about the history of railroads in America. There will also be a functional model trainset called the Hornby Collection. In the photo to the left, you can see the large platform that this train set will be set upon. Visitors to the museum will have so many new areas to explore, coming soon!





“What good is the warmth of summer, without the cold of winter to give it its sweetness?” - John Steinbeck

We like to say that EVERY season is beautiful in the gardens, even the coldest one! We haven't experienced a very consistent snowfall over the last number of years along the lakeshore, so we were reminded of how beautiful winter can be when we were gifted with so much snow right away in the beginning of the season. For all of the frigid, snowy days we experience now, the warm sunny days of summer will be that much more appreciated. Remember to count your summer blessings, in winter!



Phenology - “the study of cyclic and seasonal natural phenomena, especially in relation to climate and plant and animal life.”

Date: November 10, 2025

High Temp: 36; Sunny

Notes: All of the ginkgo trees lost their leaves over the weekend with the freezing night temps.; the Japanese maple trees have just begun to lose their leaves

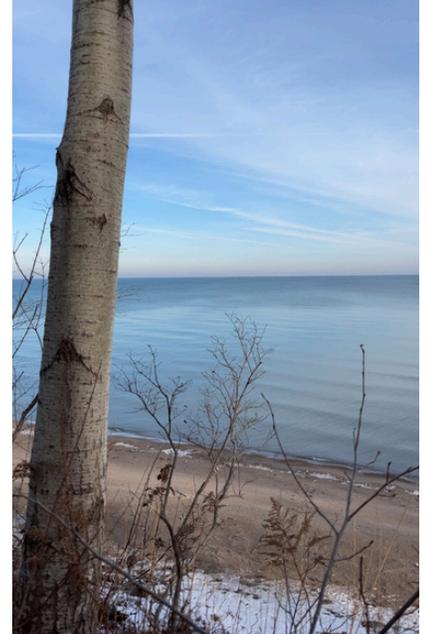


Opossum Tracks

Date: December 1, 2025

High Temp: 25; Overcast

Notes: +7 inches of snow over the weekend; deer, turkey, mole, squirrel, fox and opossum tracks were seen in the snow; witch hazel shrubs are blooming



Date: December 24, 2025

High Temp: 40; Sunny

Notes: The lake is calm and much of the snow on the beach has melted due to the warming temperatures on this Christmas Eve



Date: January 26, 2026

High Temp: 6; Sunny

Notes: Temperatures dropped to -40 degrees along the lake shore last night; squirrels and birds are filling up on Jay's birdfeeders and nearby prairie coneflowers