

The AUsome Social Group

Teen/Young Adult Recreation/Social Group

Sponsored by the Autism Society of Greater Madison (ASGM); <http://www.autismmadison.org/>

Contact: Nancy Alar, 3802 Gala Way, Cottage Grove, WI 53527

(608) 222-4378 or ausome@hughes.net

What: Visit Madison's Henry Vilas Zoo; Snack afterwards in Zoo Food Court
When: Saturday, September 5, 2009; 1:00 – 3:00 P.M.
Where: Henry Vilas Zoo, 702 S Randall Ave., Madison - see map below
Cost: Free! Bring Money for a snack at the food court

If you've been in Madison very long, you've probably already seen the zoo at least once. I've been there many times, but not recently, so I am looking forward to this activity. You can find the website for the zoo, including driving directions at <http://www.vilas zoo.org/>, But on this zoo outing we are going to do something special. We will be joining zoo keeper Rick Bilkey (and/or another volunteer zoo keeper) for a presentation in the Education and Conservation Pavilion just inside the south entrance to the zoo. This activity will be done rain or shine because the pavilion is a covered building.

Park in the Lake Wingra parking lot and come in through the Wingra Gate lake-side entrance. The Education and Conservation Pavilion is the first building on your right. You can find a map to the zoo grounds on the web at http://www.vilas zoo.org/uploads/media/Zoo_Map_2008.pdf. **On the map, the Education and Conservation Pavilion is called the Discovery Center and Herpetorium.** I believe they recently renamed the building, but the map hasn't been updated.

Zookeeper Rick Bilkey (thanks, Rick!!) has arranged for a 45 minute program for us featuring some of the trained animals they have to educate visitors about the various zoo animals. Some of the things we might see are owls, reptiles (including a python), penguins, small mammals and the largest toad in the world. We will be able to see these animals up close, learn details about them and other information about the zoo and wildlife world-wide. Thanks to Nancy Ishikawa for helping set up this outing.

After the presentation, we will go to the zoo food court and sample some "zoo food". Some of the food available includes nachos, chicken sandwiches, hot dogs & brats, french fries, cheese curds, sno-cones, popcorn, cotton candy and (of course) soft drinks. After eating, you can check out the full size carousel or the miniature train rides available at the zoo.

Most of you don't know that one of my best friends is married to a (now retired) zoo keeper. Ask me about the time I helped my this zoo keeper paint big, poster paint flowers on a live elephant or the time my friend's husband lost a 3 foot live python in their house for a month – and didn't tell my friend!

Be sure to dress appropriately for the weather. We will visit the zoo rain or shine.

Important Items and Sensory Issues:

- ☺ Bring an umbrella if it looks like rain
- ☺ Dress appropriately for the weather
- ☺ Bring money for snacks in the food court

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- What:** **A-Maze-ing Days for Autism at Treinen Farm – night tour of the corn maze with a bonfire and S’mores.**
- When:** **October 3, 2009 (Saturday), 7:00 - 9:00 pm (We’ll be doing the corn maze in the dark – spooky!)** (A-Maze-ing Days runs both Saturday and Sunday from 11:00 am – 5:00 pm)
- Where:** **Treinen Farm 5 miles west of Lodi on Hwy 60. See web site/map below**
- Cost:** **Each AUsome member gets 1 free corn maze ticket** - Additional Corn maze tickets are \$8 for adults, \$6 for age 6-11, age 5 and under free. You don’t have to go in the maze. Sitting around the bonfire and making S’mores is FREE.

This is our 4th annual ASGM activity at Treinen Farm! A big thanks to Alan and Angie, owners of Treinen Farm for volunteering their location and working so hard with the ASGM board to make this exciting event happen. The picture in the corn maze is different every year. This year the corn maze is a giant mermaid in a seascape.

The rest of the A-Maze-ing Days activities (raffle, games, food stand, wagon rides, etc.) actually end at 5:00 pm, but the corn maze is open until 9:00 pm. I thought it would be kind of fun to try to find our way through the corn maze at night. Bus loads of people actually come out to the farm after dark just to do this. Besides, this way I actually get to go in the corn maze with everyone. **Remember to bring a flash light with fresh batteries!**

Mermaid Corn Maze Details - This is the centerpiece of the farm activity. As you enter the maze you get 2 things, the first is the 1st of 8 pieces of the maze map and a stapled shut “cheat” copy of the whole maze map. You have to follow the clues on the 1st piece of the map to find the 2nd piece. If you make it back with all 8 map pieces without opening your “cheat” map, you win a piece of candy. There are 8 special places in the maze where you can find paper punches to punch holes in your map. If you find and punch 4 of them you win a bag of popcorn. Find and punch all 8 and you win more popcorn.

Once we get out of the maze, we’ll have a bonfire lit and I’ll provide the fixings for the S’mores and sticks to roast marshmallows. This activity will go on rain or shine. If it looks like rain, bring an umbrella. If it rains too hard, we’ll eat the chocolate bars in the barn!

You can find directions and more details about the farm at <http://www.treinenfarm.com/>. The basic directions to get there are pretty simple. Take I90/I94 north of Madison to the Hwy 60 exit to Lodi. Follow Hwy 60 West through Lodi and out the other side. The farm is about 5 miles west of Lodi on Hwy 60 on your right.

A BIG thanks to Capital Times Kid’s fund for buying the S’mores fixings. You can find more details about the A-Maze-ing Days for Autism at the ASGM web site <http://www.autismmadison.org/>.

There will be a lot of things to do at A-Maze-ing Days if you want to come before 5:00 either Saturday or Sunday:

- **Raffle** – We have an incredible number of raffle items available including a entire week’s stay at a condo in the Colorado Rockies. Other prizes include \$300 in cash, Badger Homecoming football game tickets and a free year of movie passes. You don’t have to be present to win. Some tickets for the 5 biggest items will be sold in advance as well as at the farm.
- **Games** – We’ll have lots of fun games with prizes. There will be several different games that can be played by people of all ages. Game tickets will cost 50 cents (a dozen tickets for \$5). Most games are similar to those at church carnivals.
- **Horse Drawn Wagon Rides to the pumpkin patch** – Pick out and buy your own pumpkin for Halloween. Ride to and from the patch in a horse drawn wagon.
- **Pond Slingshot** – buy 3 gourds for \$1 and then use the giant slingshot to try to hit the inner-tube target in the middle of the pond. If you hit the inner-tube, you win a free pumpkin.

- **Food** – The food has not been finalized yet, but we think we’ll have Hot dogs, chips and drinks available plus popcorn.
- **Volunteer Opportunity** – Contact ASGM at <http://www.autismmadison.org/> if you would like to help ASGM at this fun event.

Important Items and Sensory Issues:

- ☺ The maze may be crowded, even after dark.
- ☺ Bring a Flashlight with fresh batteries
- ☺ Bring an umbrella if it looks like rain
- ☺ Dress appropriately for the weather and wear sturdy shoes.
- ☺ Bring a coat or heavy sweatshirt just in case. It can get quite chilly after dark.

This year’s maze is of a mermaid.



Map of Henry Vilas Zoo



Important Information:

1. **The Paper version of the AUsome Newsletter has a new look!!** Thanks to ASGM staff member, Krysia Braun, for taking over formatting and mailing the paper copies. It has a much more professional look and saves me a lot of work!
2. Visit <http://www.autismmadison.org/> for other services and activities sponsored by the Autism Society of Great Madison (ASGM). The 3rd Tuesday evening of the month is either a parent support group meeting at the Midvale Community Lutheran Church or a special presentation.
3. **Volunteers needed for A-Maze-ing Days for Autism - October 3-4, 2009**
If you are planning on attending our October AUsome activity at Treinen Farm, we do have volunteer opportunities available. We can use help on Sunday for cleanup.
It would also help a lot if you can distribute copies of the information poster in your area.
Give me a call at 608-222-4378 or email nancy.alar@hughes.net to let us know if and when you might be able to volunteer.
4. **A “Day on the Farm” benefit concert for the Autism Society of Greater Madison also at Treinen Farm - September 19, 2009 – 2:00 – 4:00 pm. Sponsored by radio station 105.5 Triple M. See our ASGM web site for cost.**
Bring a blanket or lawnchairs. No alcohol please. Tickets available by phone 608-592-3481 or at the event.

What Happened at AUsome’s Last Outings?

Visit Master Gardener for Plant Information and Garden tour; snack after at Arby’s July 19, 2009 (Sunday) 1:00 – 3:00 P.M.

A BIG thanks to Master Gardener Lisa Johnson for putting so much effort into sharing information about gardening and showing us their beautiful and interesting plants. She also made some clever signs so we could find our way to the classroom where she did the presentation. Lisa said her job is to help people with gardening questions. She said you can call her at 608-224-3715 – leave a message if she is not in.

Lisa had prepared a PowerPoint slide show just for us with all kinds of useful gardening tips. Some of the things we learned included where and how to get our garden soil tested so we could then know how to correct any soil problems. She even provided us with the soil test kits so we could mail in our sample (it costs \$20 to have a soil sample analyzed). She said that it doesn’t really work to add sand to clay soil. You should add organic matter (like peat moss or leaf compost) instead, but you have to add more every year because it decomposes. We also learned that it’s best not to use garden soil in containers because it compacts too easily.

I asked her about tomatoes (which I grow a lot of every year). She said that the genes in tomato plants that control disease resistance are very close to the genes for flavor. That means it is hard to separate these 2 genes. So the best tasting tomatoes are often not very disease resistant.

Lisa said that their location is used to train teachers, day care centers, garden clubs and any other groups that want to learn best practices for gardening. They also have a program that teaches disadvantaged kids about gardening. She showed us how they worked with the kids to plant a “pizza garden” in an old, round, plastic kiddie swimming pool. They filled the pool with soil and divided it into 6 “slices”. Then they planted pizza ingredients (tomatoes, peppers and herbs) in these slices. Later in the year the “pizza garden” produce would be harvested and used as part of a pizza cooking class.

After the presentation, we got a tour of the garden that covers most of the grounds all around the building. We saw lots of vegetables and flowers, including tomatoes, beans, herbs, roses, cone flowers, black-eyed-susans and many more. We also saw hydrangeas and learned that the flowers are different colors depending on whether the soil is acidic or alkaline. One of the most interesting plants was an ornamental onion that looked like a small fireworks burst on the ground. There were flowers planted in a circular area as a “color wheel” where the flower colors sequentially followed the red, orange, yellow, green, blue, etc. spectrum pattern. There were many other plants like trees and vines. Ann also helped us to identify and name weeds that are a constant problem in any garden.

After the garden tour, some of us went to Arby’s to have a snack.

ASGM/AUsome combined Private Swimming Party at Monona Pool – Lunch at Rocky’s Pizza – August 15, 2009 (Saturday), 9:00-11:00 A.M.

We have been really lucky with our outdoor AUsome outing weather this year. The temperature was perfect and it was sunny. Because this was a combined AUsome and Autism Society of Greater Madison (ASGM) activity, we had a really great turnout! We had almost 50 people swimming and lots of others lying around on deck chairs. You don’t have to be a swimmer to go to an AUsome/ASGM swimming party. We’ve got the life guards so well trained that they even let us immediately in the refreshment gate without having to be reminded that the AUsome group uses that special entrance.

We had the usual assortment of noodles to play with in the water. One young guy brought a battery powered fish that swam by itself. I don’t think the water slide was ever empty. It usually had a line on it. I even went down the waterslide myself – lots of fun! We all shared popcorn and lemonade. Thanks to all who brought snacks to add to the fun. There were almost no bees around this year which was great.

After we got done swimming we went over to Rocky Rococo’s Pizza for lunch and conversation.

It was nice to be able to see a number of families there with all ages. It is one time that all the members of ASGM and AUsome can get together for a family centered outing.



**Nancy & Tom Alar's 25th Wedding Anniversary Party – August 9, 2009 (Sunday),
1:00 – 4:00 P.M.**



Matt and Liz. The food was fantastic and the cake plentiful! The fact that they could celebrate 25 years later in the same place is really a wonder. Bellini's Italian Restaurant was indeed the perfect place for a wedding and the perfect place to recognize the relationship of to wonderful, caring people. Thank you for letting us celebrate with you!

Nancy and Tom Alar's 25th Wedding Anniversary Party and benefit for their two favorite organizations was certainly a festive, classy and happy occasion. Friends and family came by droves to celebrate with them and their children,



AUsome Social Group Philosophy and Ground Rules

Group Sponsor:

The AUsome Social Group is sponsored by the Autism Society of Greater Madison (ASGM). **It is highly recommended that you join the Autism Society of Greater Madison. You should at least subscribe to the Autism Society of Greater Madison newsletter (subscription cost is only \$5) if you are not a chapter member.** It is possible that Madison chapter membership may be required in the future as the AUsome group becomes larger and requires more resources. You can get more information about the Madison Chapter (including an extensive autism resource list), by calling (608) 213-8519 or sending a note to ASGM, 2935 Fish Hatchery Rd #101, Madison, WI 53711

See the ASGM website at <http://www.autismmadison.org/> for membership information and a link to the AUsome Group web pages <http://www.autismmadison.org/ausome/index.htm> . If you join the Autism Society of Greater Madison (\$55 for family membership), this automatically gives you the chapter newsletter plus membership in both the state (ASW) and national Autistic Societies so you will get all those mailings as well. (However, it does not work the other way. If you join just the national Autistic Society, you will not get state and local mailings. This is confusing for a lot of people because sometimes you get renewal notices from all three groups. I find it most convenient to join at the local Madison organization. Then you can ignore all the other renewal notices.)

Group Purpose:

The AUsome group was organized to provide recreation and social opportunities for people ages 12 and over who are challenged by sensory/communication issues related to Autism/Asperger's/PDD/Tourette's. However, anyone is welcome to join the activities. I try to set up activities that allow for social interaction between group members and between parents and siblings of the group.

The AUsome Newsletter:

The AUsome Group has a separate newsletter that is sent out every other month, containing details for the next 2 outings and a summary of what happened the past 2 months. The AUsome newsletter will be sent out at least a week in advance of the next outing (I hope). Some things may be planned with short notice if something interesting comes up. If you have an e-mail address and are OK with receiving the newsletter that way, let me (Nancy Alar) know. It saves time and postage if notification can just be sent electronically. I will maintain a mailing list of participants, and will verify this list annually – usually in January in conjunction with a call about

tickets to the juggling show. Our AUsome newsletter is also available on the web at <http://www.autismmadison.org/newsletter/index.htm>

General Activity Plans:

The general plan is to have an activity about once a month that will last from 2 to 4 hours. The target day will be the first Saturday of the month. However, this is subject to schedule conflicts and availability of interesting activities. Activities that we have done include bowling, miniature golf, gymnastics, movies, a talent show, art gallery visit, fossil hunt, Little Amerricka (a local amusement park), swimming, horse back riding, Go Cart driving, farm market, airplane rides, pottery making and a limousine ride. Each January we attend the 47th annual Madfest Juggling show. In August we have a private pool party at the Monona Pool. Every November we have "video game night". If you are especially interested in a particular activity or have other suggestions, please let me know.

Sensory Issues:

Every effort will be made to accommodate sensory issues by limiting cigarette smoke, strong odors, unusual lighting, large crowds and high noise levels where possible. If an activity might involve some of the sensory problems mentioned above, they will be described in the AUsome newsletter. It will not be possible to accommodate everyone's needs all the time so individuals must decide their tolerance levels for each activity. Please let me know if you have any special requests in this area. Also, please be sensitive to requests from group members who have special sensory needs (such as problems with chewing gum.).

Logistics:

Some individuals may need to arrange for a support person to accompany them. Please use your best judgment in this area. Transportation will be the responsibility of each individual. However, effort will be made to provide help with transportation by designating central meeting points, etc. **Please call me, Nancy Alar, (608) 222-4378 or e-mail me at ausome@hughes.net if you have transportation problems, and I'll try to help work out a way for you to get there.**

Since these activities are loosely organized social outings, each person participates at their own risk.