

Ralph Perkins & Joan Ebbeson, editors  
Ann Paulson & Jan Hostage, photographers

Please send your news, views and photos to [rphprkns@yahoo.com](mailto:rphprkns@yahoo.com) or to mailbox #1. Thanks, Elizabeth Stevens and Tom Vannatta, for contributing to this issue.

## COMING EVENTS

### AUGUST, DATE & TIME TBA

A special event to be hosted by Tom Vannatta, exploring the nighttime displays of the August sky.

### WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 9

#### 4 P.M., Location TBA

**Hilltop Players** - One-act play readings performed by Hilltop residents and directed by Nancy Stone. More details next issue.

### WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 14

#### 4 P.M., Hilltop House

**2nd Annual Oktoberfest** - Returning due to popular demand! German music (by Vesilind Brass), food, fun...and beer, of course. More details in future issues.



**Got your attention?**

See Field Notes, page 2.



## Skies Over Hilltop

By day, sunny skies fuel the growth of the robust plants in Hilltop's community garden. By night, particularly in August, they feature an intriguing display of astral features.

Have you ever walked out on a clear night and wondered what you were seeing in the sky above you? If so, please consider joining other curious Hilltop neighbors as we get together one late evening, after sunset and evening twilight, during the second week in August. Since the observation will be weather dependent, the exact date will not be determined until a few days prior to the event. Watch for a notice in your mail cubby.

The summer sky is currently in full bloom with bright planets Jupiter and Saturn rising in the east, the Summer Triangle overhead, and the Milky Way arching north to south. Summer constellations are prominent from horizon to horizon. With any luck we may also spot some meteors from the Perseid meteor shower. If you missed the comet Neowise, you'll surely not want to miss this!

Tom Vannatta will be our guide. If you have questions, contact him at [gala.19@tds.net](mailto:gala.19@tds.net)

**Welcome, New Neighbors!** Maxwell Buck Harrison and Nathalia have recently moved from Salt Lake City to his grandmother Jackie Buck's Unit 127. They are both museum curators.

**2020 Elections** Applications for absentee ballots to vote in the September 8 primary and November 3 general elections are available at Hilltop office. This year only, by an act of the state legislature, all NH voters qualify to vote by absentee ballot if they choose.

## Ralph's Field Notes: "Big as a Volkswagen!"

About a thousand years ago, I wrote a nature column about snapping turtles for the local papers. Several readers told me they'd seen one that fit the above title. I held my tongue, knowing that what they *saw* wasn't really what *was*. The records at that time were an 18 1/2 inch shell and 70 pounds; it's now 19 inches and 76 pounds. A 25-year captive in Nebraska is 90 pounds! (Nowadays, it's Mini Coopers, they're big as, not VW "bugs.") Whatever. the snapping turtle is way bigger than any of NH's other six turtles. People will remember what they saw, aided by the magnifying effect of looking into the water. I know of at least one snapper right here at Hilltop, seen in the Cluster 5 pond this spring.

Snappers can be identified by the big, warty head, the saw-tooth back of the shell and the long tail. June is known as the month of turtles, because turtles are often then seen crossing roads. These are usually egg-laden females, crossing to and from nesting sites. Snappers lay 20 to 40 pingpong ball-size eggs, most of which are dug up by raccoons, skunks and other predators. "Nests" are in loose soil in sunny spots; these may be up to 1/2 mile from the turtle's home water. In colder climes, hatchlings may not dig their way out until spring.

Like all NH turtles, snappers eat whatever plant or animal material is available. As a kid, I saw big snappers grazing along the bottom like contented cows, then going into shallow water or even onto shore to steal our stringers of fresh-caught bass.



**Works of Art.** The handsome gardens that grace Hilltop's common areas are true works of art, with equal emphasis on both words. Karen Cooper, shown above, is one of a number of volunteer worker/artists.



"What are you reading?" That question spawned a request for a new regular feature beginning this month. Hilltop readers share some of their recent favorites. Look for more in September.

Shelley Candidas appreciates the relatives and friends who have kept feeding her books during the library's shut-down. Her recommendations include The Shadowland by Elizabeth Kostova, a story filled with "very satisfying twists and turns" set in former Soviet-bloc Bulgaria. She also enjoyed Sally Beauman's novel, The Sisters Mortland ("well-crafted") and Wideacres by Philippa Gregory, the first book in an intergenerational trilogy, Shelly found "fun and inadvertently funny!"

Nancy Nichols has been following the Good Morning America show bookclub. The most recent selection was Sex and Vanity a retelling of E.M. Forster's classic, A Room with a View.

Brian Stillson just finished The Rosie Project by Don Tillman, a fun read that Hilltop Book Group members will remember from our 2018 menu.

Snappers behave totally differently in vs. out of the water. One day, while snorkeling in a stream, I came face to face with a big one. I immediately backed away as fast as I could, and he/she did the same. On the other hand, snappers feel helpless on land and get really aggressive. Allegedly, a snapper can break a broomstick in half with its bite. The closest I ever came to this is when we kids prodded (with *long* sticks) one my uncle had caught while fishing. Incidentally, my uncle chopped off its head with an ax, and the head continued to snap for half an hour. Some readers may find this scene gruesome, but it made a great day for a little kid!

