

---CONSERVATION DISTRICTS OF IOWA (CDI)---

CONNECTIONS

The Conservation Districts of Iowa (CDI) informs, educates, and leads Iowans through our local soil and water conservation districts to promote conservation of natural resources.



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From: CDI President Dennis Carney

Thank you to everyone involved with CDI's 74th annual business meeting that was held last week. Our virtual, compressed format was certainly different than any of our previous meetings, but we conducted business, approved financials, elected officers, heard partner reports, and recognized our award winners, all from our respective locations. A special thank you to all the commissioners who logged into Zoom and helped CDI move forward in our efforts to support soil and water conservation.

Thanks also to the CDI staff, officers, and Board who made this safe, travel-free, get together possible as well as IDALS staff who agreed to this new format and helped with gathering information on award winners. **Congratulations to our 2020 group of award winners and to CDI's new Vice-President April Burch.** My thanks go to Jack Boyer for his service as Vice-President this past year and his continuing work on CDI's Board. Please [Click here](#) for audio and video recordings of the annual meeting.

I also want to follow up with an appeal for your district's support of CDI's scholarship fund. **Without our auction at annual conference, we are relying on districts to contribute to this very worthy cause.** To learn more or contribute: [CDI Scholarships](#). 2020 continues to be a year of extraordinary challenges. Last week's storm severely affected producers in many of our districts. CDI will be working with our partners and the legislature to make sure needed relief and financial support is forthcoming. Best wishes to all of you and thank you again for your support of CDI.

Nomination deadline nears for NACD awards – enter your candidates today!

NACD President Tim Palmer reminded commissioners during the 2020 Annual Business Meeting that NACD is still seeking nominations for two prominent awards – the *NACD Friend of Conservation Award* and the *NACD Distinguished Service Award*. **Deadline for nominations is Monday, August 31, 2020.** To learn more or nominate someone from your district, [click here](#).

Executive Director Report – John Whitaker

I was invited to listen in on a webinar relating to soil health which was aimed to help Iowa legislators understand the importance of the issue. To me, the information presented was not new, but many of the Senators and Representatives who participated were excited by the material. I am hopeful that the resolution CDI passed at our annual meeting will help support legislative efforts to include soil health as an actionable item in Chapter 161A.

There are many new staff members working for the USDA NRCS and helping these new folks understand agriculture and conservation in your area is a great way to introduce them to the NRCS/IDALS/SWCD partnership in conservation. Many of these young folks are passionate about conservation and our environment but some may lack personal experience on farms or farming equipment. You can offer them tours of your farm, time in the combine or tractor, or maybe walking your pastures to learn firsthand what you see and experience daily. There is a little bit of ‘teacher’ in all of us and this could be your chance to ‘teach’ the next generation of conservation leaders

We welcome Kristy Oates to Iowa as the Acting State Conservationist. Kristy comes from Texas so for her, the Iowa experience is new. Those of you who joined the virtual annual business meeting were able to see Kristy give the NRCS report and listen to her tell her conservation experience.

After the virtual annual business meeting, **we received requests from Commissioners and other for help in their using Zoom to facilitate monthly meeting.** Toward that end, we have purchased 4 additional host licenses that we will use for this purpose. The area planners will all have host capabilities and be able to host meetings. This will also allow them to continue their planning work without having to travel. Some of the plans have been on hold during the pandemic but this will restart the planning.

Boone SWCD Commissioner April Burch voted CDI’s new Vice President



CDI Vice President April Burch

April Burch, running unopposed, was unanimously voted as CDI’s newest executive leader, assuming the Vice President position previously held by Jack Boyer, CDI Board of Directors member and Tama SWCD Commissioner. For two years a Boone SWCD Commissioner, Burch told Commissioners during the annual meeting online she is motivated in her work by a strong lifelong conservation ethic.

“In my early 20s I worked with the AmeriCorps Watershed Stewards Project for two years,” Burch said. “I was working with the California Department of Fish and Game biologists, along with scientists, conservationists and others.” Burch said their efforts focused protecting endangered Coho salmon.

“As the sole urban commissioner in the Boone commission, I focus my efforts on outreach to other urban residents, as well as grow more knowledge about urban conservation efforts,” said Burch. “One of the things we’re working on now is the creation of a community garden with a demonstration rain garden. We encourage residents to create mini-CRP projects and rain gardens around the urban area.” Burch said she is honored to serve as CDI Vice President in partnership with President Dennis Carney and is “looking forward to supporting the work that he and everyone else is doing to promote conservation and restoration practices.”

Hubert Staggs honored for 50 years of conservation

Rod Swoboda

Editor, Wallaces Farmer

Honoring his longtime active involvement and support for soil and water conservation, the Iowa Outstanding Soil and Water Conservation District Commissioner Award for 2020 was recently presented to Hubert Staggs. For 51 years he has served as a commissioner and two years as assistant commissioner for the Wayne Soil and Water Conservation District in Wayne County in southern Iowa.

Currently vice chairman of the SWCD board, Staggs served as chair for 24 years from 1988 to 2012. He also serves as treasurer of the Wayne Boosters, a conservation advocacy group. The boosters are a local organization promoting and advocating for natural resource conservation.

For decades, Wallaces Farmer has sponsored the Iowa Outstanding Soil and Water Conservation District Commissioner Award.

Conservation for community

Staggs was nominated for the award by the Wayne SWCD. In a letter of support for his nomination, Sherry Trower, conservation assistant in the SWCD office at Corydon, said, "Hubert should be recognized for his years of service not only to our district but the entire community."

She added, "Hubert has always been ready to step up and do whatever is necessary when it comes to either the Wayne Soil and Water Conservation District or the Wayne Boosters. Many times, I've called him needing something and he would come to our office to help. Active in organizations in our county, he has served on the Farm Bureau board and is serving on the Veterans Affairs board. Hubert is one of those unsung heroes that doesn't want to be noticed or recognized for all he does. He believes that's just what you should do: help your community and your neighbors." For more, read the complete [Wallaces Farmer article](#) honoring Herbert Staggs.



Wayne SWCD Vice Chairman Herbert Staggs

Congratulations to the CDI 2020 Annual Award Winners!



"Conservation Farmer of the Year" Mark Jackson and family, Mahaska SWCD

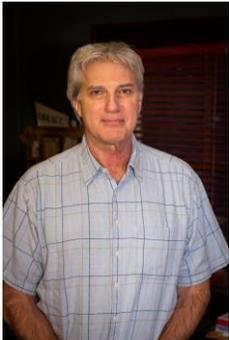
During the online 2020 CDI annual meeting, a number of awards and honors were announced to well-deserving recipients for their efforts this year – and in most cases, many years prior – to promote and support soil and water conservation practices, their work in support of local SWCDs, forward-thinking land and water management on local farms, and honors for a life of service to conservation. [Click here](#) to see a complete PowerPoint list of winners: "Dennis Carney CDI Award Presentation".

COVID-19 and the Communications guy

How the virus gripped a CDI office staff member – and wouldn't let go

Joe Hayes

CDI Communications Coordinator & Planner



Joe Hayes, CDI Communications

On Wednesday, July 22, I awoke with unusually sore shoulders and upper arms. I joked with my wife, Jill, that it felt like I'd spent all yesterday lifting free weights. We both laughed. That I would lift free weights was the joke.

Do I got it?

The next day, I knew I was ill. "Summer flu", I said. It's happened before. Body ache. Headache. Low fever. It'll pass. I participate in a Zoom meeting with a SWCD district; work on preparations for the 2020 CDI Annual Meeting. That night, as symptoms grow, the thought I don't want to think: "Maybe COVID-19? Can't be." The next day, Friday, I lose my sense of taste and smell. On Saturday, the Covid test comes back: "Positive". Four days later, I'm on my back in an isolated room at a Des Moines hospital, nurses and doctors stepping in and out of virtual Hazmat suits before entering.

I got it.

That I "of all people" would be grappling with a pandemic virus that has moved across the globe seemed remote, the odds I'd contract the coronavirus impossibly small, especially in Iowa. My wife and I sheltered at home – my new CDI temporary office. Respectfully for others, I wore a mask when venturing to the grocery and hardware stores – mostly; there were times I'd forget. We ate at home – usually; we enjoyed occasional early evenings with friends at outdoor restaurants, mask-free. I'll never know how I got it. But I got it.

Getting through it.

In the isolated emergency room, doctors x-rayed lungs, took blood, plugged me into an EKG. I resisted hospitalization – shackled to a hospital bed, separated from family and friends – not for me. Fortunately, the x-rays showed lungs still clear, and I was home that same day. Covid is a fist that tightens its grip, then tightens it more. Symptoms grow quickly in intensity. For three weeks, in an upstairs bedroom: unrelenting coughing, fever (103° at one point), muscle pain, headaches, unforgiving nausea, zero appetite, other ... unpleasanties. Yet the most debilitating of Covid's embrace: the fatigue, the exhaustion, the shortness-of-breath (read that as "panting like a dog"). Every small effort – a walk to the kitchen and back – leads to exhausted collapse. The one mercy God offered: a wife who is a registered nurse. Before doctors suggested it, Jill had my finger in a "pulse oximeter" every hour, measuring blood oxygen levels; charting numbers three times a day – pulse/ox, temperature, blood sugar. Keeping me hydrated. Filling me with protein shakes. Consulting on Zoom with our family doctor. As those who know say: doctors don't keep you alive – nurses do.

Getting over it.

By week four, in small but noticeable increments, the Covid grip loosened. Headaches and muscle pain gone; fever settling down; nausea abated; appetite returning. In a month, I'd lost 37 pounds – from 241 pounds to 204 (my college weight, fwiw). Yet the grip does not let go. Fatigue, coughing, shortness of breath only grudgingly, by small degrees, relent. As of this writing – a day short of five weeks since I awoke with sore muscles – I still manage symptoms of Covid's selfish grip. Yet I know I'm lucky. I had a struggle, but not the struggle many families endure. I will survive this when many do not.

Don't get it.

I don't know how I got COVID-19. We get it because someone else does not care about our health as much we do about theirs; "someone else" sometimes was me. I wasn't as vigilant as I should have been, a mistake I only make once. This is Iowa; threat levels vary; you know your area. But if you don't want to contract this virus – and you don't – practice social distancing ... and wear a mask. Make it a message to your community: "I don't wear a mask to protect me; I wear a mask to protect you." It's worth a life to try.

