



Welcome to TRAIL's new executive director

Christine Scheetz brings wide leadership experience



A love of reading and writing led her to change from business and comparative literature to an English major at UI, Christine Scheetz recalls, but it was the hours spent outside the classroom that set her future in motion. During those student years Christine served on the board of

the Johnson County Child Abuse Prevention Coalition and volunteered at the local Crisis Center (now CommUnity).

"After those experiences, I was hooked," she says today. "I realized what a difference it could make in a person's life to provide both material support and emotional support." And so began her longtime commitment to health and human services in many forms.

As recently announced, Christine is TRAIL's new executive director. Having joined the Board of Directors in 2024, she was already well acquainted with the TRAIL mission and is eager to work with all those touched by TRAIL.

An Iowa City native, Christine's background includes leadership at a Des Moines youth shelter, Iowa Center for HIV/AIDS Resources & Education (ICARE), United Way of Johnson and Washington Counties, health care and aging-

focused organizations, both for-profit and nonprofit, and regional and national volunteer roles. She is also a Certified Senior Advisor and Certified Dementia Provider.

Christine's own experiences with her aging parents and family members, as well as becoming guardian for her three nephews following her sister's passing, further focused her interest in caregiving. **"I learned how isolating caregiving can be," she says, "and how important it is to support caregivers."**

When it comes to leadership, Christine knows exactly what she values; communication, accountability, and flexibility are at the top of the list, along with a growth mindset.

Always a reader at heart, Christine enjoys fiction and nonfiction alike, with a particular love of Irish authors such as Colum McCann and Maggie O'Farrell. Another love of hers is cheese—dating back to her job at age 16 at Iowa City's Lorenz Cheese House.

"I am honored to join TRAIL of Johnson County in this role and build on its strong foundation of supporting older adults in our community," Christine says.



A meet-and-greet with Christine will be announced in the coming weeks; watch for details!



"For a healthy heart, don't stay apart"

That little rhyme is a handy reminder that heart health isn't just about getting regular exercise and maintaining a healthy diet. Research shows that **meaningful social connections** also play a key role in maintaining cardiovascular health. *Continued on page 2*

“For a healthy heart, don’t stay apart” *continued*

This is especially important for older adults. Many of us become more socially isolated as we age. Retirement means the end of daily contact with colleagues; longtime friends move away to be closer to family; adult children follow their careers to distant cities. For all these reasons, our social circles can shrink and we may find ourselves alone more often than we’d like.

Here’s the interesting thing about the latest research on heart health. While both social isolation and loneliness are associated with higher rates of heart failure, being alone isn’t the determining risk factor. It’s whether a person **feels** lonely—which the American Heart Association defines as “when people perceive themselves as isolated, causing them to feel distressed.” That stress—manifesting as anxiety, depression, and more—is what imperils our hearts, a lesson made even more clear during COVID.

What’s the solution? It’s not as though doctors can write prescriptions to “make new friends,” which also is something that’s harder to do later in life. But in fact, making new friends may be exactly what’s needed. And **TRAIL can help**.

As a TRAIL member, if you are feeling lonely and isolated:

- ♥ Let TRAIL know. Call Jessica in the TRAIL office (319-800-9003) or reach out to her via email (membersupport@trailofjohnsoncounty.org). She’s kind, friendly, and full of suggestions to help you connect with others.
- ♥ Consider attending a TRAIL member event, whether a Happy Hour gathering, morning coffee, or group outing. Feeling shy? A TRAIL member or volunteer would be happy to take you along as their guest.
- ♥ If you’re a Full TRAIL member with access to our volunteer services, sign up for our Phone Buddy or Friendly Visitor programs. Scheduling daily or weekly conversations is a great way to build a meaningful relationship with someone new.



Heartfelt thanks to TRAIL donors

It’s Valentine season, the perfect time to share some love with the many TRAIL members, volunteers, and other friends who supported TRAIL with charitable gifts in 2024. Contributions from individual contributors hit a record high in 2024.

THANK YOU!

Collectively, individual gifts, corporate sponsorships, and grants totaled **nearly \$93,000 last year**, accounting for about two-thirds of TRAIL’s annual budget. These philanthropic dollars are essential to fulfilling TRAIL’s mission. They help us keep membership fees steady, fund our knowledgeable and helpful TRAIL staff, pay for materials distributed at community events such as last fall’s Life Planning seminar series, allow us to offer reduced-cost memberships to low-income seniors, and more.

Giving to TRAIL is easy, and gifts of all sizes make a difference. You may contribute online by visiting our [website](#) or send a check to the TRAIL office at 28 South Linn Street, Room G03, Iowa City, IA 52240. Easier still is setting up a monthly recurring donation through your bank account or credit card; contact the TRAIL office at 319-800-9003 for more details.

Again, our heartfelt thanks for your generosity in 2024. It’s going to help make 2025 TRAIL’s best year yet!



Engaging Volunteers

More than one way to volunteer

Volunteering with TRAIL takes many forms—from filling “high profile” service requests and making daily phone calls, to the “behind the scenes” work of our committees. Committees usually meet once a month for about an hour (sometimes on Zoom) and members may work on projects between meetings.

Spread the word! The committees listed below are seeking new members.

Volunteer Committee

Chair Allison Andrews says, “We are looking for individuals excited to help grow and nurture our volunteer base. TRAIL cannot grow without volunteer growth!” Let us know if you can:

- Help provide volunteer orientations
- Participate in community engagement opportunities, such as volunteer fairs
- Share creative ideas for retention activities and recognition opportunities

Membership Committee

Chair Bob Brooks says the committee has two main objectives in 2025:

- Cultivate new memberships
- Support existing members and monitor member satisfaction

Committee projects include assisting with promotions and presentations to enlist new members; doing orientations and check-in visits with new members; seeking member feedback with an annual satisfaction survey; and helping with member social activities.

If you have skills to offer or interest in a committee, contact Jessica at the TRAIL office at 319-800-9003 or email her at membersupport@trailofjohnsoncounty.org.

Development Committee

Chair Janene Panfil says, “Our committee members help by making connections. You don’t have to ask for money, just share your passion for TRAIL and why you support it.”

Committee members also:

- Build relationships with individuals and local businesses
- Identify new businesses and individuals who would be excited about and supportive of TRAIL’s work
- Thank businesses and individuals for their support of TRAIL
- Share expertise on planned giving (this is an area we want to build upon)

Marketing and Communications Committee

Chair Denice Connell says new members for this committee are needed to help:

- Produce TRAIL’s monthly newsletter—providing story ideas, writing, editing, and taking photos
- Create and implement marketing plans to help TRAIL grow
- Maintain TRAIL’s web pages
- Provide content for Facebook postings



Meet TRAIL’s 2025 Board Members

Left to right: Todd Shores, Susan Shullaw, Alex Taylor, Christine Scheetz, Bob Brooks, Allison Andrews, Scot Maiers, Janene Panfil, Jeanne Bancroft, Yu Yu, and Patricia Heiden.

A chance meeting at a University of Iowa newcomers' event two years ago has birthed a valuable resource for adult children caring for their aging parents.



When Jennifer Jones and Ceil Miller-Bouchet (pictured below: Ceil (L) and Jennifer (R)) met at that UI event, they quickly bonded as working professionals who also happened to be caring for aging parents. Jen was nine months into her newly created role as program coordinator for the Optimal Aging Initiative at the UI's **Csomay Center for Gerontological Excellence**. When Ceil realized that one of the center's missions was to support caregivers, she tucked Jen's card away and promised herself to get in touch.



Jen and Ceil met later for coffee, and both realized “the huge need to support, serve, and provide resources for adult children

caring for their elders,” says Jen. The women decided to fill that need by creating a specialized support group.

The group's first meeting was hosted by the Csomay Center in July 2024 and attracted 22 people. The gathering gave caregivers the opportunity to share the issues and components of caregiving for which they wanted more information. “That brainstorming session set our agenda for subsequent meetings,” Jen recalls.

“I was worried when we welcomed caregivers who were obviously alone and overwhelmed,” says Ceil of the group's early meetings. “But I've been heartened by comments from more experienced caregivers who lend their helpful advice.”

“Aging and caregiving are very powerful shared experiences,” Jen adds. “The ‘community’ factor of this group provides comfort and solace as we continue to share our stories.”

Today the group has doubled in size with more than 40 people on the mailing list. Discussion topics have covered how to deal with the emotions of caregiving for aging parents; decisions around moving to assisted living; and the differences between home health and home care, and independent and assisted living.

In 2025 the group will alternate between social gatherings at The Green House in Iowa City with more formal presentations via Zoom. At the group's next Zoom meeting on February 26, speaker Mary McCall will guide attendees through advanced care and end-of-life planning.



To be added to the group's mailing list, contact Jennifer Jones at jennifer-e-jones@uiowa.edu or Ceil Miller-Bouchet at ceilmillerbouchet@gmail.com.



Need to **DOWNSIZE** a bit?

Donations are now being accepted for the annual **Shelter House Book Sale**, planned for Saturday and Sunday, March 8 and 9. Gently used books, CDs, DVDs, vinyl records, puzzles, and board games are being accepted. [Visit site](#) for more details.



Staying safe from **SCAMMERS**

Fraudulent practices aren't going away; in fact, they are becoming more prevalent.

Scams reported by people aged 60+ were up 11 percent in 2024 over the year before, according to the FBI's Elder Fraud Report. Criminals stole more than \$3.4 billion from older Americans in 2023.

Here are two scams to look out for:

Tech Support Scams: Older adults are five times more likely than their younger counterparts to lose money to tech support scams. These pop-up messages tell you your computer has a virus, and you should call to give the company remote access to your computer.

To stay safe: Legitimate companies like Best Buy won't contact you about problems with your computer. Never click a pop-up message. If a person calls you unexpectedly about this, it's almost surely a scam. Hang up, even if the number looks real.

Grandparent Scams: Someone claims to be your grandchild or representing your grandchild, asking you to send money right away for various reasons. Artificial intelligence can now create fake voices that are very convincing. Likewise, your voice can be captured on a phone call, imitated, and then used to fool your bank or other financial institution.

To stay safe: Hang up and contact your grandchild or other family member directly to confirm or deny the request.



You might also consider signing up for the free webinar series, **"Protecting Older Adults from Financial Exploitation,"** presented by the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. The next session takes place on Wednesday, March 5, 1 to 2:30 PM. You'll find more details and registration information on the TRAIL calendar.



Your pet will **always** be part of your family.

Pet Cremation Services
210 Holiday Road, Coralville, IA
(319) 594-9259
www.faithfulcompanionsia.com



Thanks to Faithful Companions for sponsoring this month's newsletter.



NOTE: Some events are virtual, while others are in person. Full details for each event can be found on [TRAIL's online calendar](#).

New events are frequently added, so check TRAIL's weekly calendar preview emailed on Fridays or the [online calendar](#) to stay up-to-date.

Calendar key: **BLUE** events are for TRAIL members. **GREEN** (virtual) and **YELLOW** (in-person) events are hosted by other groups but may be of interest to TRAIL members.

Members pay their own fees if there is a cost associated with an event (\$).

Want to attend an event, but need a ride? Call Jessica at 319-800-9003 or email her at membersupport@trailofjohnsoncounty.org.

TRAIL Guide is published on or about the 15th of each month by the TRAIL Marketing and Communications Committee for the benefit of TRAIL members, donors, volunteers, and friends. If you have questions or suggestions about the newsletter, email info@trailofjohnsoncounty.org.

Upcoming TRAIL Events Calendar

[Hawkeye Hoops Huddle](#)

Monday, February 17, 10:45 AM to 1 PM

Brown Deer Cooperative great room, 1920 Country Club Drive, Coralville

[Book Club: *The Demon of Unrest* by Erik Larson](#) (via Zoom)

Monday, February 17, 1 to 2 PM

[X Marks the Arts Presents: Free Week](#)

Tuesday, February 18 thru Friday, February 22

Various venues in and near downtown Iowa City

[Dine-Around Lunch at Reunion Brewery](#) \$

Wednesday, February 19, 11:30 AM to 1 PM

Reunion Brewery, 516 2nd Street, Coralville

[Book Discussion: *Wintering* by Katherine May](#) (via Zoom)

Wednesday, February 19, 6 to 7 PM

[Yarning Group](#)

Thursday, February 20, 1 to 3 PM

Home of Vicky Tardy, Iowa City

[Morning Coffee](#)

Tuesday, February 25, 10 to 11:30 AM

Home of Vicky Tardy, Iowa City

[Let's Talk Books: *Celebrity Memoirs*](#) (via Zoom)

Tuesday, February 25, 7 to 8 PM

[Mall Walk at the Coral Ridge Mall](#)

Wednesday, February 26, 9 to 10 AM

Coral Ridge Mall (meet at carousel), 1451 Coral Ridge Avenue, Coralville

[Functional Movement for Daily Life and Functional Gadgets to Help with Fall Prevention](#) (via Zoom)

Tuesday, March 4, 1 to 2 PM

[Member Happy Hour](#) \$

Tuesday, March 4, 4:30 to 6:30 PM

Orchard Green, 521 South Gilbert Street, Iowa City

[Protecting Older Adults from Financial Exploitation Webinar Series](#)

(via Zoom)

Wednesday, March 5 and Thursday, March 6, 1 to 2:30 PM

[Downsizing: Insights and Tips presented by Karrie Craig of Downsize4u](#)

(via Zoom)

Thursday, March 6, 10 to 11 AM

[Night of 1000 Dinners](#)

Thursday, March 6, 6 to 8 PM

Unitarian Universalist Society, 2355 Oakdale Road, Coralville

[Soup Lunch](#)

Wednesday, March 12, noon to 1:30 PM