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Sunset kayak photo by Aaron Holznagle

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## FALL FUNGI FOUND AT GRNA

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### FUN WITH FUNGI AT GRASS RIVER NATURAL AREA

by

Arlene Westhoven, GRNA naturalist

I remember when I became 'hooked on fungi'. I was living in Ohio and as I walked down my porch steps I spotted a large morel growing in the shrubbery. That started a fascination that 'grew like a fungus'. My purpose is to introduce you to some of the fascinating fungi here at Grass River.

Most people hunt mushrooms in the spring seeking morels. However, we see more varieties in late summer and throughout autumn because there is more to decay as the season goes on. Fungi are decomposers that break down dead organic matter, returning nutrients to the environment. Some are parasites and sap nutrients from or cause death to their hosts. We will tell you some mushrooms are poisonous. The best advice is to hunt mushrooms for interest, not for the table. Here are a few of our interesting favorites:



### PUFFBALLS

Puffballs can be as small as crabapples or as large as volleyballs. Some have smooth, leathery skins, others have geometrically patterned coverings. Slice a puffball in half to see the white spores like a marshmallow throughout. As the spores mature they darken, dry out and are poofed out through an opening in the top. A giant puffball (*Calvatia gigantea*) can release 7 trillion spores. Some make an explosive sound which gives them their

name, Lycoperdon.



### SULFUR SHELF

Chicken of the Woods (*Laetipori sulfureus*) is a fungus that grows on dead wood or dead parts of living trees. It looks like a stack of bright orange, yellow-edged ruffles. The fungus has fine pores on the underside. It's a spectacular sight because of its color and abundance.



### SHAGGY MANES

This group, the inky caps (*Coprinus spp.*), grows in large colonies in poor soil. It's seen along road edges, sidewalks, and other gravelly areas. It looks like a lawyer's wig, hence the name shaggy mane. As it matures and opens, the white gills change to pink, then black, at which point the caps become a dark ink and drip away to...nothing.



### PURPLE WEBCAP

The *Cortinarius* group contains many species with violet caps, stems, and gills. This, the *C. violaceous*, is the most purple of them all. The color comes from an ink containing iron ions. It has widely spaced gills and a veil over the cap.

Thanks to my colleagues at GRNA and fellow mycologist, Franny Bluhm, for content and to GRNA Education Director James Dake for his photos. Here at Grass River, we are always available to check out a mushroom photo and also conduct Fungus

Forays. Call 231-533-8576 to obtain scheduling information.

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# AND NOW THE GRNA "FUN GUYS"

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## Ruben Meneses and Brandon Nichols



For the past several years, the Docksider Torch Lake hosted a "Spring Fling" fundraiser for GRNA in May as the popular restaurant began welcoming back the area summer residents. This year that event was thwarted by COVID-19. Ruben and Brandon, the new owners of the Docksider, were determined to continue the tradition begun by Gordie Schafer, however, so they suggested to Jenn that we have a "Fall Fling" instead. They will give 50% of all sales during the four hour time period to GRNA. That is why we think they are a couple of fun guys! Plus, just look at this picture of 2019's check presentation and you can see that Ruben, Jenn, and Brandon are all having a good time!

**Please join us**

**Docksider Fall Fling  
Tuesday, September 22, 2020  
5:00 pm - 9:00 pm**

**We plan to meet or exceed the temperature shown on the Docksider sign in the photo, so deck dining should be pleasant.**

Masks will need to be worn and social distancing will be in place. If you are not comfortable joining us in person, you can place an order for pickup during those hours

and that will benefit GRNA as well. Call 231.377.7777 to place your order. We hope to see you on Tuesday!

The Dockside is located at 6340 Old Torch Lake Dr, Bellaire MI 49615.

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## EDUCATION DIRECTOR JAMES DAKE



Here's another fun guy at Grass River Natural Area, shown here sharing a joyous moment with his daughter.

James just recently completed the Revised and Expanded 2nd Edition of our Field Guide to Northwest Michigan. Thank goodness he did because the first edition just completely sold out! There is a new section on fish species at GRNA and another one on fossils. Additional species were added and updated to other sections as well. Dake informed the Board recently that the new books have shipped, so we should have them in hand soon. Watch the website for information on their arrival and ordering. This project blended two of his favorite things, his passion for nature and his love of photography, so we know he had fun putting it all together. If he could have found a way to set it all to music which could be performed with his family, he would have been ecstatic.

Another fun thing James has been doing is working on ways to adapt programming at GRNA to make it possible in smaller groups. With the addition of our new kayaks, he was able to add sunset kayak trips. He also worked with the other GRNA naturalists to develop reservation only guided programs such as owl prowls, wildflower walks, and fungi discovery that you can arrange by reservation. Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, all programming is by advance reservation only, even if it is scheduled on the GRNA calendar.

Thank you to James for working to make things feel "normal" at GRNA.

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## Land and Facilities Steward Brian Thelen



It may not look like Brian is having fun, but we are pretty sure he is, because despite taking a full time classroom job at the Children's House Montessori school in Traverse City, he is still working at GRNA when he can find the time. He is even conducting a fall stewardship day from 9:00 am to noon on Saturday, September 26th to get the natural area and the education center ready for the winter. If you wish to participate, call the Grass River Center at 231.533.8576 for additional information.

Brian, we are going to miss your smiles and positive attitude at Grass River if you ever decide to leave us completely, but until that day comes we will still enjoy having "fun" on the trails with you.

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## ONE LAST FUN THING FOR GUYS AND GALS

Exciting news - we are relaunching our Trails Challenge! It's simple: hike all 7 of our trails between now and Dec 31st, fill out a short trail log, get some sweet GRNA swag and be entered to win a book prize pack, including a copy of the NEW EDITION of our Field Guide to Northwest Michigan.

Visit <https://www.grassriver.org/grnatrainschallenge.html> for all the details.

**See ya on the trails!**

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## RIVERFEST 2020

A complete report on Riverfest will follow in the next edition of In Otter News, but for now we want you to know that the event surpassed our expectations in all regards!

THANK YOU TO EVERYONE WHO PARTICIPATED IN THIS  
GROUNDBREAKING EVENT!!

### Thank you to all our 2020 Riverfest Sponsors



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### CONSIDER A DONATION

Our financial well being is dependent on programming dollars and donations, and with the former sidelined for the most part at the moment, donations are of paramount importance. Your generous support is always greatly appreciated, but in these difficult days, your willingness to help us continue our mission with a personal donation promotes you to Nature Warrior status at GRNA.

Grass River Natural Area is a nonprofit organization that has flourished for fifty-one years because of the generous support of people who value our mission "to manage the Grass River Natural Area, conserve and protect its watershed, and provide opportunities that

increase knowledge, appreciation and community-wide stewardship of the natural environment".

If you believe in our mission and want to help us fulfill it for many years to come, please click on the Donate button below. Your support is greatly appreciated.

## DONATE



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