

Bird Wing Report

April 2023



Notices and Reminders

Bird Bash: June's Bird Bash will take place over the weekend of **June 17 and 18**.

Bird Wing Outing: June's Bird Wing outing will take place on **June 27, starting at 6:30 p.m.** Not sure where we are going yet, but details will follow closer to the date. Last year, we went to Powassan Lagoon and Hills Siding Road where Linda Stoner got a photo of the Eastern Kingbird in her nest. **Meet in the Urban Planet (formerly Sears) parking lot by 6:30 sharp.** We can car pool.

Books: Linda Stoner's book, *Chippy's Family Helping Others*, is now published and hardback copies can be purchased directly from Linda. Nice to support a fellow Bird Wing member and the book is really something what with Linda, a former studio photographer, making the sets with a real live chipmunk posing in each set. It really is a book in which a picture is worth a thousand words! To order a copy, email Linda at lindastonerchipmunks@gmail.com. To find out more about the book, visit her website: www.chipmunktales.com.

Chimney Swifts: If you haven't yet been out to see the roosting Chimney Swifts entering the chimney at St. Vincent de Paul Church, you really must get out to see them. Better go soon or they will be off to nest elsewhere. Best view is from the parking lot at the back of the church, located on Fifth Avenue near Wyld. When I saw them, about 200 entered the chimney, although at one point, there were about 500!



A little birdie
told me

Bird Wing Outing



Stephen O'Donnell

A few of us gathered at Laurier Woods on May 22 for our first Bird Wing outing of the year – and we were not disappointed for we saw a total of 39 species! Not everyone saw all 39 birds, but most of us did. It was a great group effort by Dick Tafel, June and Kevan Telford, Erica Buck, Katharine McLeod, and Renee Levesque.

The American Redstart followed us during our 2.8 km walk, as did a fair number of Yellow Warblers, (photo at right) some Chestnut-sided, many Ovenbirds (photo at heading), a Black-throated Green, a Common Yellow-throat, a Blackpoll and a Yellow-rumped.



Renee Levesque



David Rooke

Not to be outdone by the warblers, the Red-eye (photo at end of article) made its presence known throughout the walk, as did one Philadelphia Vireo.

A couple or so Least Flycatchers were around, as well as two Great-crested Flycatchers, (photo at left) giving us great views and calling for a good 3 to 4 minutes!

The thrushes present were, of course, the American Robin and the Veery; the sparrows, the Song, the White-throat and the Swamp (photo below) which gave us a good look; the swallows, only one Tree

and one Barn; the finches, only the American Goldfinch; the woodpeckers, the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, the Northern Flicker and a Downy; and the regulars, Red-winged Blackbirds, Common Grackles and Black-capped Chickadees, some Blue Jays, an American Crow or two, the Red-breasted and the White-breasted Nuthatches.

The two Common Ravens were around, the male keeping an eye on us, the female feeding one nestling. There may have been a second nestling hidden from us behind the female feeding the one, but we could not see it.



Stephen O'Donnell

A Great Blue Heron flew over, as did a Ring-billed Gull. Some of us heard a Belted Kingfisher at the second pond.

The Gray Catbird greeted us as we entered and a couple of Warbling Vireo as we left.



The highlight near the end of the walk, however, was seeing and hearing the brilliant male Baltimore Oriole! (photo at left) See Seeds and Cones, for another interesting bird seen at the exact same location during the second Friends of Laurier Woods walk.

Of course, it was disappointing not to have seen or heard the Scarlet Tanager, the Sora, the Virginia Rail, the American Bittern and the Green Heron, but imagine how delighted we will be when we finally do see them. We have to leave some birds for another time so we have something to look forward to.

On the cover this month is a photo of a Common Tern taken by Stephen O'Donnell. It wasn't seen on our outing, but two were seen by some of us at Sunset Point.



Bev Kingdon, Swan Lady honoured

By Renee Levesque; photos as indicated

Bev Kingdon, our very own Swan Lady, was honoured on April 29, along with the many volunteers of the Trumpeter Swan Restoration Program, at LaSalle Park in Burlington with a three-panelled plaque for their work on saving the Trumpeter Swan from extirpation. (Photo at right.)

It was Harry Lumsden, a biologist with the Ministry of Natural Resources, who died one month shy of his 99th birthday in February 2022, who began the project to save these beautiful swans by receiving permission to obtain eggs from a flock of Trumpeters in Alaska and then getting families to raise the birds in captivity until such time as they could be released into the wild.



Peter McCusker, Burlington Today

One of the families who embraced the desire to save the largest swan in the world was Bev and Ray Kingdon who owned a 200-acre property in Chisholm Township as well as a home in Burlington. Ray died in September 2018. He and Bev had been married 57 years and spent as much time as they could at a summer home they also owned on Lake Nosbonsing. They became some of the earliest volunteers with what became known as the Trumpeter Swan Restoration Program.

Over four decades Harry, with the help of Bev, Ray and the volunteers of the Trumpeter Swan Restoration Program, brought the Trumpeter Swan back from the brink of extinction to a thriving population of approximately 2,500. For his passionate hard work and dedication, Harry received The Order of Canada in 2004.

It was at Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre in Midland that the first pair of captive breeding Trumpeters found a home. They became known as Big Guy and Lady Girl and they successfully

raised their first cygnet known as Pig Pen who became the first Trumpeter Swan to mate and raise a family in the wild in more than 100 years. In 1993, Pig Pen was also the first Trumpeter in over 100 years to migrate south to LaSalle Park for the winter. Today more Trumpeters over-winter at LaSalle Park than any other location in Ontario.



Renee Levesque

Pig Pen spent 10 winters with Bev and over 80 Trumpeters can be genetically linked to her. Very unfortunately, Pig Pen was hit by a motor boat in Georgian Bay, but her legacy lives on.



In 2017, Bev was the recipient of Ontario Nature's 2016 J.R. Dymond Public Service Award, given to an individual who has shown distinguished public service that has resulted in exceptional environmental achievement. She was presented with the award by Angela Martin, former president of Nipissing Naturalists Club. (Photo at left.) It was fitting that it was Angela who presented Bev with the award because it was through Angela's efforts that the Ministry of Natural Resources allowed two sets of Trumpeter Swans to be released into Callander Bay, 12 in 2002 and 14 in 2003. Many current members may remember those times well because many were at Callander Bay to watch this momentous occasion.

Noah Cole

Bringing home 26 swans to Callander Bay, a bay in which Bev learned to swim, was a very special and joyous time for her. “The most exciting time of my life,” she said. And no wonder. Bev, who grew up in Callander, fell in love with swans at the age of 8. She loved them so much that she made a promise to herself that she would have swans at her home when she grew up – and the rest is history!

Today, many Trumpeters migrate north and many are seen in Lake Nipissing in the spring and late summer/early fall. The photo at the end of this article shows Bev with her Trumpeter, Ava, at Cache Bay in September 2017. For those who are not familiar with Ava’s story, I attached it as a separate article. It initially appeared in *The Woodland Observer* in the October 2017 issue.

Bev said at the time of her Ontario Nature award, “I worked with swans because it was a loving passion and a pure joy. I never expected recognition.” I am sure she and all the volunteers of the Trumpeter Swan Restoration Program felt exactly the same when they were honoured with a plaque at LaSalle Park.



Renee Levesque

The Azores: A more affordable version of Hawaii

By Denise Desmarais, with photos by Denise unless otherwise indicated

This March, my husband and I visited Sao Miguel Island to enjoy a bit of relaxation and in hopes of seeing some birds that are not commonly found on our side of The Pond. Sao Miguel is the largest and most populous of the fourteen volcanic islands known as The Azores. (We were told that “Azores” should be pronounced with an A as in apple, not as in acorn.) It is 1400 km west of mainland Portugal, pretty much in the middle of the Atlantic. Until recently, it has been a fairly well-kept secret, but over the past few years, its tourism industry has grown. This was our third visit.



The island is beautiful, with breathtaking views of the ocean and of lush green valleys appearing around every corner. While we were there, it was still chilly and very breezy, but the azaleas were in bloom (photo above) and we were thankful to have left the snow behind.

Sao Miguel is a volcanic island, with beckoning thermal baths scattered across the island. One prominent attraction is the Lagoon of the Seven Cities, two small lakes known as Twin Lakes that can be crossed by a bridge. (photo below) The lakes were formed in the centre of a dormant volcano and are an important freshwater resource. It felt as if we were visiting a cooler and more affordable version of Hawaii.



During the summer months, the island is spectacularly covered in hydrangeas, and pictures of them are often featured in tourism advertisements. However, the hydrangeas are an invasive species that have affected the bird population by choking out endemic vegetation, so not all Azoreans are proud to call them their national flower.

There is not a lot in the way of public transportation, so visitors need to rent a car or take tours, and there seems to be a growing number of tours available. The main highways and secondary roads are modern, but once in the villages or downtown Ponta Delgada, the island's major city, the streets are narrow and congested and driving can be a bit of an experience. The streets were built to accommodate horses, so they are narrow, and finding a parking spot can be a challenge.

We spent our first day exploring the town of Ponta Delgada, where we encountered some Ruddy Turnstones (photo at right) and Yellow-Legged Gulls at the marina. Yellow-legged Gulls are to the Azores what Ring-billed Gulls are to Northern Ontario – abundant. They look similar to Herring Gulls, but with yellow legs, a slightly darker back, and a red ring around the eyes.



Over 300 species of birds have been recorded on the island, but most of those are accidental, either because their navigation systems malfunctioned or they were blown off course during bad weather. There is a mix of American and European birds, and some Europeans visit the Azores hoping to see American birds on European soil.

My understanding is that there is only one truly endemic bird, the Azores Bullfinch, although there are several endemic subspecies, including the Eurasian Blackcap and the Island Canary. It is thought that they arrived from mainland Africa or Europe sometime during the last million years, and during the ensuing centuries they have evolved into a slightly different version of the original species.

The Azores Bullfinch (Azoreans call it Priolo) was once so abundant that it was considered a pest, and farmers believed that it destroyed blossoms in their orange orchards. During the late 1900s, the government paid a bounty to Azoreans who presented Priolo beaks as evidence that they had killed them. As well, the introduction of invasive plant species destroyed the birds' habitat, resulting in their being restricted to a smaller and smaller area. Their numbers declined precipitously by the early 20th century and again in the 1970s. (Photo of the Azores Bullfinch at left.)



Today it is thought there are only about 40 breeding pairs left of the bullfinch which is found only in the eastern part of Sao Miguel (Nordeste), the least densely populated part of the island. There is now a government-led program to protect and restore the natural vegetation, and the Priolo seems to be recovering. Since 2016, it is considered “vulnerable” rather than “critically endangered” as was the case prior to 2016, but they are still few and far between, and without a guide, a birder's chances of finding them are slim.

We hired a fellow named Gerby (not his real name, but that's what he likes to be called) to shuttle us about the island and bring us to the birding hotspots. He is a Dutchman turned Azorean, fiercely dedicated to all things birdy and all things Azorean. He has lived on the island for several decades and is passionate about preserving its natural environment. He takes small groups of tourists on birding day trips, and while doing so, he educates them on the history of the island and the challenges related to balancing the economic benefits of tourism against its infringement on wildlife habitat. However, he is not all serious, but very funny.



Gerby picked us up at our hotel early in the morning in his well-loved van complete with bird decals as seen in the photo at left. We then headed to the eastern end of the island to find the bullfinch.

After driving some not-so-well-travelled roads, we set out on foot on our bullfinch quest. We were lucky enough to locate it within a few minutes and as luck should have it, three of them posed for several minutes while snacking on seeds. Unfortunately, I still didn't manage to get a good photo probably because I was too excited! Gerby almost always finds the Priolo for his clients, but the Priolo isn't always as patient as it was with us.

Once we had our fill of admiring the bullfinch, Gerby transported us to several birding hotspots in the central and western parts of the island. On a lonely country road we were able to observe a flock of Cattle Egrets, several Glossy Ibis and a Ruff. On route, the Buzzards could be seen overhead.

One of our first stops was at Furnas Lake, near where traditional stew is cooked in a metre deep hole, using volcanic heat. Once upon a time, not that long ago, locals were able to place their cauldrons of uncooked stew in a hole in the morning and return later in the day to retrieve their supper. Nowadays, however, the area is fenced (necessary to keep tourists from falling into boiling water) and regulated. Now, only paying clients can use the thermal cook stoves.



At Furnas Lake, Gerby showed us how to walk in single file as we approached birds so as not to scare them off, and he was very strict about the “no talking while stalking” rule. We saw Eurasian Robins, Chaffinch (they are everywhere), a Goldcrest (similar to our Golden-Crowned Kinglet), Island Canaries, they too are everywhere), a Pied-Billed Grebe, Eurasian Coot, Eurasian Blackbirds (also everywhere), Eurasian Moorhens, several Little Egrets and a Eurasian Spoonbill.

By then we had developed an appetite, so dined picnic-style on Gerby’s homemade sandwiches, traditional Portuguese custard tarts and tea. While we ate, the Blackbirds (photo at left) and Chaffinch hopped about

nearby, and the Eurasian Robins posed in the trees. The Eurasian Robin is not related to our American Robin. Our robin is a thrush and the Eurasian Robin belongs to the chat subfamily of the Old World flycatcher family. When the early settlers came to Canada, they were reminded of the Robin they left behind in the Old World because of its reddish breast and so called it a Robin.

We also saw some Eurasian Common Teals (related to our Green-Winged Teal) and Eurasian Wigeons. The Eurasian Common Teal has a horizontal stripe on its body rather than a vertical shoulder stripe. As a vagrant, it is sometimes found on the east and west coasts of Canada. The Eurasian Wigeon, also sometimes found in North America, has a brown head and lacks the green stripe of the American Wigeon.

Our last stop was at the Urban Park, just outside Ponta Delgada, where we were able to lean on a stone wall and observe Eurasian Goldfinches, Eurasian Greenfinches and Blackcaps as they visited a pond. The Eurasian Goldfinches (photo at right) were a bit of a surprise because I wasn’t expecting them to have a red facemask.

By this time, it was 6:30 and Gerby delivered us back to our hotel. Including Eurasian Starlings, House Sparrows, Rock Doves and Collared Doves, we saw about thirty species, which is respectable by Azorean standards.

We had travelled from one end of the island to the other, learning a lot about birding and habitat

conservation, while having a few laughs. All that birding and brain work had tuckered us out! We ate a cold piece of leftover pizza on the balcony and went to bed, tired, but happy.



Wikipedia, Francis C. Franklin

Seeds and Cones

Aberrant White Plumage: At some point in our birding life, we have probably all seen a bird with aberrant white plumage, a bird that may have bold white patches where it should not have any, or a plumage that looks as if it has been bleached, or a completely white plumage. Not all these birds would be considered leucistic, a default term used by many birders, but they are birds that have an abnormal condition that reduces pigmentation in the feathers, and also sometimes in the bill and the legs, but never the eyes. (Only in Albino birds are the eyes pink.)



I have seen plenty of aberrant white plumage birds – American Robins, an American Crow, a Canada Goose, Common Redpolls, and a Double-crested Cormorant that I can recall.



This May, Grant McKercher saw an American Robin in Callander with extensive white plumage, while I had a white and light brown White-crowned Sparrow in my yard. I have seen more aberrant white plumage robins than any other species, but this was the first time I had seen a White-crowned Sparrow. Grant's photo is at the top of the page and mine is at left.

You have to be careful, though, because sometimes a bird will lose feathers, especially in its tail, when it has had a close call with a predator. When this happens, the new feathers

sometimes grow in white and then become their normal colour when the bird undergoes its molt.

According to experts, there are birds whose plumage mutation is progressive greying rather than leucistic, and this type of mutation is actually the most common type of mutation involving white feathers. Progressive greying means a bird has normal juvenile plumage, but with each

progressive molt, it becomes whiter, with the white feathers starting in the head and then in time randomly spreading over the body. But in terms of leucism, when leucistic birds hatch, they already have the number of white feathers they will always have. Progressive greying and leucism can look very similar and almost impossible to tell whether a bird has progressive greying or leucism. (From Jean Iron's Bird Report, Black-capped Chickadee with Aberrant White Plumage. Jean also sent me an article that appeared in *North American Birds* (2022) by Hein Van Grouw, a leading expert in colour plumages in birds. If you would like a copy, please let me know.)

It is not always an easy life for birds with aberrant plumage. They are more vulnerable to predators because their lighter plumage does not offer them protective camouflage. And because plumage plays an important part in finding a mate, aberrant plumage birds may find it difficult to find a mate. In addition, their feathers are weaker and will wear out more quickly, making flying difficult. Also, white feathers affect the birds' ability to withstand heat and cold.

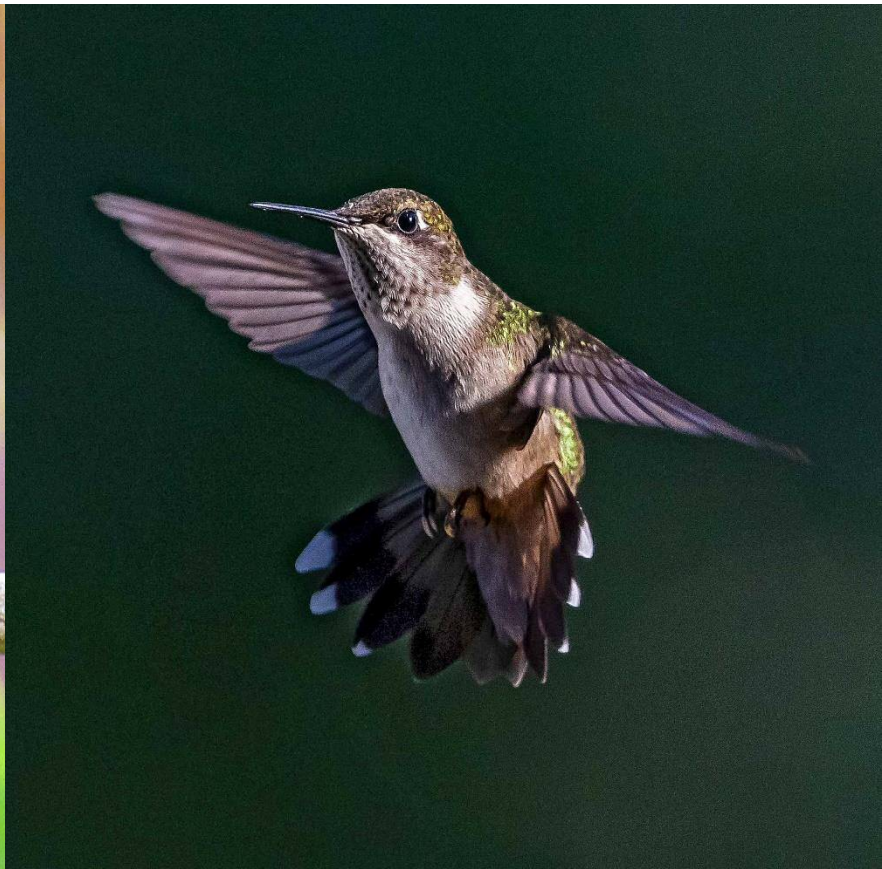
Not Only for the Birds: Sometimes when we are birding, we get distracted by animals showing up. Deer are probably the most common animals that we see when out birding, along with raccoons and porcupines. But sometimes we see bears, not in the woods, but in a farmer's field. In fact one so distracted us in West Nipissing on a Bird Wing outing last August that we almost lost sight of the hundred or so Sandhill Cranes flying by. Recently, on an overcast foggy day, Dick Tafel and I saw a moose galloping by one of the cells at Verner Lagoon. (my photo below) And also recently at Callander Lagoon, April McCrum and I saw a fox saunter towards us until it changed its mind and trotted off. I am sure there are many other examples. Garry Waldram tells me he often encounters wild animals on his birding outings.



Hummingbirds: Who cannot be delighted when Ruby-throated Hummingbirds (photo of male below left and female below right) return to our area around mid-May. Because of a metabolic rate 77 times faster than ours, hummingbirds need to feed continuously on flower nectar and small insects. However, up until very recently in our area there have been few blossoms, few insects and some cold nights since their return. However, not to fear, hummers are able to enter torpor to protect themselves from starvation. It also helps if we have our hummingbird feeders up and filled.



Kevan Cowcill



Stephen O'Donnell

Hummingbirds, of which there are 361 species, are the smallest living bird, with the most miniature being the male Bee Hummingbird (photo at left), weighing about half a teaspoon of sugar. It is a hummingbird endemic to Cuba.



Charles J. Sharp, Wikipedia

Hummingbirds may be little, but their iridescent feathers turn them into “Lilliputian beauties”, and if we are in awe of their shining feathers, imagine how their mates, who see more vividly than we do, react. In fact, a study from Yale found that “the diversity of bird

visible colours in hummingbird plumages exceeds the known diversity of colours found in the plumages of all other bird species combined.”

You may recall from the documentary we saw on woodpeckers at March’s Zoom meeting that Ruby-throated Hummingbirds planned their migration in tandem with Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, enabling them to feed on the sap from birch trees while waiting for flowers to bloom. This year for the first time – and thanks to the documentary – I watched the hummer in my yard follow the sapsucker, waiting for it to fly off so it could get at the sapsucker’s holes.

Hummingbirds are found only in the Americas. Many of them are now endangered.

Bird Wing has the PBS DVD, *Super Hummingbirds*, which could be shown again, perhaps next April before next year’s Ruby-throated arrives.

Friends of Laurier Woods Walks: I was able to attend only one Saturday morning Friends of Laurier Woods walks with Dick Tafel, the second Saturday in May, but it was a productive walk with warblers out in almost full force – Ovenbird, American Redstart, B&W, Nashville,

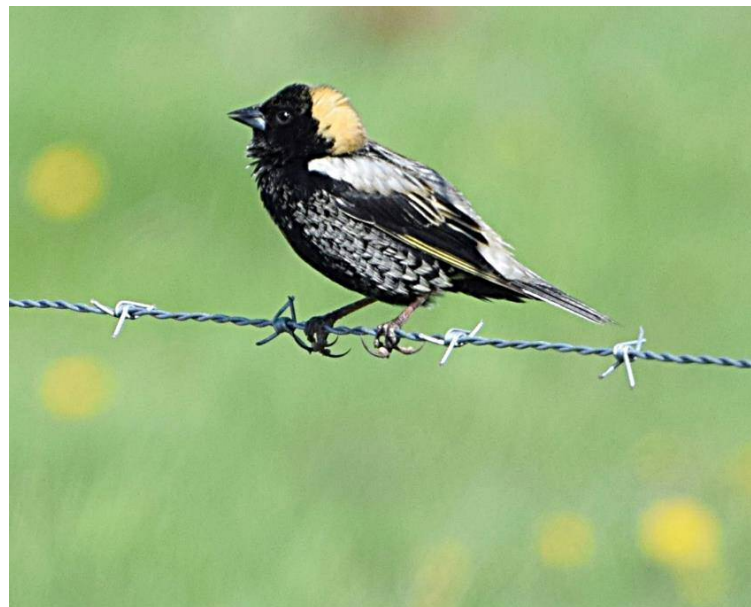
Blackburnian, Common Yellowthroat, Magnolia, Chestnut-sided, Black-throated Green, Yellow-rumped and Yellow. The male Blackburnian and the Ovenbird (photo at left) both posed nicely for us, offering great views, as did the Veery. The Warbling Vireo sang its heart out as we watched a Least Flycatcher. And then there was an Eastern Kingbird at the second pond and a Gray Catbird bidding us goodbye.

In addition to seeing all these birds so well, two species stand out, a fly-over Bobolink except for a very brief period when it landed – maybe a first in Laurier Woods? – and watching mama raven feed her two nestlings. We all saw the raven feeding her nestlings, but only Brittany Tartaglia and her partner saw the Bobolink. Dick was quite disappointed not to have seen it, but he made up for not seeing it by seeing

a dozen or so a few hours later on Purdon Line.
(photo at right)



Courtesy of Brittany Tartaglia



Renee Levesque

What was also especially nice was seeing and getting to know members of Bird Wing many of us have not often seen in person, like Brittany, Angela Mills, and Linda Conway, and renewing acquaintance with a former Bird Wing member, Daniel Currie.

Monique Beuparlant: I was very sad to hear from Therez Viloette that her friend, and a sometimes Bird Wing member, Monique Beuparlant, recently passed away. Most of us who knew Monique will associate her with our August outings to Cache Bay. We knew her as a jovial and very funny lady who made us all laugh with her tales. Although she hadn't been well these last few years and was not able to join us at Cache Bay in recent years, there was not a time I went on a Cache Bay Bird Wing outing that I did not think of her. I also remember her from the first Bird Wing meeting I ever attended in September 2012. The photo below is of Monique at left, Lori Anderson middle, and Sarah Wheelan right.



Renee Levesque

Condolences also to members Ken Gowing, Rick Tripp and Erica Buck who recently lost their mothers.