

# SWELL LETTER

## May 2026 Volume 6, Issue 5

### Meet our new SWELL members

#### Joni Lucas



My name is Joni Lucas, and I began my Swell journey in September. I was on the waiting list for 3 years and so happy that it was finally my turn! I live on a farm near Bankston with my husband Jeff. We've been married for 42 years. I've been retired for five years after working at Dubuque Schools for 35 years, all of them at the Forum. Jeff and I have two handsome sons, two beautiful daughters-in-law and six amazing grandchildren who live close by. We are blessed. I am currently the volunteer coordinator for Mary's Inn Maternity Home in Dubuque. If you are interested in being a babysitter or a driver, look me up! I volunteer at the Resurrection School library (where 3 of my grandchildren attend), at the Community Clothes Bin (in conjunction with the Epworth Food Pantry) and play pickleball two mornings a week. In my down time, I enjoy reading, stamping and scrapbooking. I am thoroughly enjoying my time at Swell where everyone is so friendly!



## Do You Live or Eat or Eat to Live?

Our eating habits are often deeply rooted in our upbringing, influenced by the parents, friends, and experiences that shaped our early years. However, the landscape of nutrition has shifted dramatically over the decades. I vividly recall Sister Mary St. Ronald at St. Patrick's in the mid-1960s warning our class that nitrates were being added to foods to extend shelf life at the expense of human longevity. At that time, heart disease was the undisputed leading killer, and the average life expectancy was significantly lower—66.8 years for men and 73.7 years for women. While medical advancements have since improved heart health and extended our years, cancer has risen to rival heart disease, even surpassing it as the leading cause of death in 22 states as of 2014. Sister Mary Ronald's had a vision; she saw the transition from natural, wholesome nutrition to the era of highly processed foods. When we see canned goods that can sit on a shelf for years, we must question whether a product with such an unnaturally long life is truly safe for us to eat. The modern solution is to look past the shelf-stable aisle and prioritize fresh, organic options.

The way we prepare and perceive food has undergone a fundamental shift from "eating to live" to "living to eat." Evolutionarily, humans are hardwired to crave fats and sugars because they once signaled the dense energy essential for survival during times of scarcity. These substances stimulate the brain's reward pathways, releasing dopamine and providing a sense of comfort that was once a biological necessity. Historically, calorie-dense foods were rare, and our bodies were fine-tuned to seek out fats and carbohydrates to survive potential famines. However, we no longer live in an era of trekking West in horse-drawn wagons or fending off wild creatures. Most of us do not need massive quantities of fat and sugar to sustain us through long periods of physical hardship, yet our prehistoric cravings remain. I was confronted with this reality by my son, Ty, while filling a tray at a buffet. He asked me if I knew when my next meal would be, and when I answered, "tomorrow morning," he simply asked, "Then why are you taking so much

food?" This interaction highlighted how many of us eat unnecessarily large portions out of habit rather than need. We are fortunate today to have resources like MyPlate.gov which has recently changed to RealFood.gov to help us select correct portions, healthy quantities, and focus away from processed foods. While younger generations might argue that the nutritional guidance of the past—like the original food pyramid—was flawed, it is important to remember that we lacked the advanced nutritional science and instant information available today. The philosophy of the 1960s and 70s was a product of its time, but we now have the tools to understand exactly what our bodies require.

The final obstacle we face is the personal adoption of the "Eat to Live" philosophy. This requires a cultural shift away from the idea that "coolness" is defined by frequenting expensive restaurants for high-calorie, high-fat meals and sugary drinks. Instead, true health and social fulfillment come from preparing nutritious meals at home and sharing them with family and friends. By moving away from the allure of processed flavor and inflated price tags, we can reclaim our health. Choosing to eat for sustenance and longevity, rather than mere entertainment, is the most vital adjustment we can make for our future.

## New 2025-2030

## Government Dietary Guidelines

### Eat More Real Food

1/2

#### Key Recommendations:

- ✓ Eat a variety of protein sources (eggs, poultry, seafood, red meat, beans, nuts, legumes)
- ✓ Choose full-fat dairy without added sugars
- ✓ Consume colorful, nutrient-dense fruits & vegetables
- ✓ Choose whole grains like oats, brown rice, and whole-grain breads



Prioritize nutrient-dense, whole foods and switch to balanced, less processed meals. Reduce refined grains, added sugars, and unhealthy oils and additives.



Learn more at [RealFood.gov](https://www.realfood.gov)



Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2025-2030,  
[realfood.gov](https://www.realfood.gov)



--Gary

### Graces Brumley's SWELL Experience

I just wanted to reach out to you and the rest of SWELL and say thank you for such an amazing opportunity. SWELL has been such a great experience for me! Being able to interact with all the members as well as learning from Mr. Wittman has been amazing. I have learned so much and really enjoyed the period of time I spent with SWELL. Between conducting research, creating presentations, and participating in class, I have grown my communication skills in this profession and overall knowledge of health and wellness. I was able to form so many great relationships with members in such a short time period! I have gained so much experience about the benefits of exercise and Taichi long-term, as well as the importance of nutrition throughout your daily life. I love the tight knit community here at SWELL, and how welcoming everyone was towards me!

Being able to conduct research, carry out new tests, and create learning presentations to inform you all, allowed me to further my education and help you guys gain necessary knowledge about staying healthy as you age. I plan to earn a bachelor's degree in health sciences here at the University of Dubuque and use my skills learned through SWELL, to pursue a career in cardiac ultrasound! I am so thankful to you all for this experience and I wish everyone the best as you carry on with your health journeys!

–Grace



## Doctors want more women lifting weights

Experts say welcoming gyms and education would help.

BY ALBERT STUMM

*The Associated Press*

During her first year of college, Elisabeth Bradley was inspired to try weightlifting after she followed a woman tracking her fitness transformation on social media, one barbell at a time. Then, Bradley found herself to be the only woman in the weight room at San Diego State University. “I felt like I stuck out a lot, and I just thought, ‘OK, I’m gonna look dumb,’” she says. Intimidated by a room full of grunting, muscular men, she moved over to the cardio area, mirroring countless women who, for various reasons, avoid the free weights and machines. But with research mounting on the benefits of resistance training, experts say a few things need to change at the gym to make it more enticing to women. Michelle Segar, a behavioral scientist at the University of Michigan who studies exercise habits, said that making the environment more palatable and familiarizing women better with weights will lead more to use them. More representation will in turn get more women to continue. The National Institutes of Health recommends that everyone — men and women — do resistance training at least twice per week. That includes all kinds of activities that require physical force, such as weight machines, resistance bands or body-weight exercises like pushups and squats. Resistance training has been found to help prevent heart disease, improve long-term mobility and lower blood pressure, said Brad Schoenfeld, professor of exercise science at Lehman College in New York City. Some research suggests that women might even benefit more than men from weight training because it staves off osteoporosis and age-related muscle loss, which women are more susceptible to, he said.



Chloe Spriggs (left) takes a moment as members of Teddington women’s rugby team use weights in London.

### WHY WOMEN SHOULD LIFT WEIGHTS

#### WEIGHTS:

Training sessions can help

“The bottom line is, resistance training is a cure for all sorts of issues,” Schoenfeld said.

### WHY MANY WOMEN DON’T WANT TO

Daisy Arauza, a 30-year-old mother of two in Menifee, Calif., does some Pilates and cardio-based exercise at home using

videos and online tutorials, and would like to invest in a gym membership to help with strength and weight management. But she lacks confidence, she said, and doesn’t know enough yet about weights and gym etiquette. “I have a lot of self-consciousness because of how my body looks right now. When you think of the gym, you think about people that are already more fit. And so, it feels like I have to make myself fit into this mold before I can feel comfortable being in a gym setting working out in front of other people,” she said. There’s also still a stigma about women lifting weights, Bradley said. Told for years that being skinny is the ultimate goal, some falsely believe strength training will make them look bulky. Schoenfeld said few women need to worry about building too much muscle because it’s hard for anyone to gain a significant amount — especially women, who have lower levels of the muscle-building hormone testosterone. And it’s easy to reduce training intensity if you don’t like the results, he said: “It’s very, very easy to lose muscle.”

### WHAT GYMS AND WOMEN CAN DO ABOUT IT

Months after her initial bad impression, Bradley shared her strength-training goals with a male weightlifter in her dorm, who showed her the bodybuilding ropes. The boost inspired her to found Girl Gains, a female weightlifting club that now has dozens of chapters at colleges across the country. “Other things get shoved down our throats, like Pilates and cardio and yoga, but they complement each other,” Bradley said. “Being stronger in the gym is going to help you progress in Pilates. Having muscle is going to help make you a faster, better runner.” Women embarking on strength training should do so with an empowering and realistic message, advocates say. Complementary introductory training sessions can help, but a cursory introduction from a trainer in a revealing outfit won’t, said Segar. “Most women have tried to achieve the perfect body for decades, and it only leads to a sense of failure,” she said. Instead of focusing on how the exercise makes them feel, they’re thinking about how they’re being perceived.

Women who find community in the weight room work together on their own targets, getting stronger and pushing themselves, Bradley said. “One of the things we always say is, ‘The gains look good on you.’”

### **WOMEN’S GYMS AND CHILD CARE**

Some women find they can focus better on their workout when men aren’t around.

At the women-only Goddess Gym in Peterborough, England, Charlie Sturgeon said she’s happier than she was in mixed-sex gyms where she had “some quite weird experiences where people would just stare, pull faces, make comments. And here, with being women only, it just feels like there’s a sense of community.”

Some gyms try to make women more comfortable by offering day care on site.

Michelle Kozak of Phoenix, who has two young children, canceled her membership when her gym stopped offering childcare. And she isn’t comfortable with hardcore gym culture.

“I don’t want to make the gym my entire personality,” she said. “I just want to have some time to prioritize being healthy.”

**--Article submitted by Lisa Wittman**



### **SWELL Intern of The Year Award**

"I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Dr. Thomas, Dr. Cattani, and Dr. Romagna for their exceptional work in preparing such high-caliber interns. Zoe, in particular, stands out as one of the very best. “We want to acknowledge her accomplishments during her internship with (SWELL). Zoe E. Connell, a Kenosha Wisconsin native majoring in Wellness and Exercise Science, will graduate in May with the class of 2026. She has displayed exceptional commitment and leadership, positively impacting over 215 Dubuque area seniors. Zoe’s compassionate and skilled approach to wellness, including independently leading classes and mastering Tai Chi routines make her exceptional. She has made a lasting impact on the SWELL community, including completing a study of the effects of guided meditation on 32 SWELL members. This study showed how guided meditation enhanced 3 critical components. All test subjects showed improvements in Deep Sleep, Circadian rhythms, and Detoxification of the mind and body.

Congratulations Zoe E. Connell, 2025-26 SWELL intern of the year.



### Appreciation for Inter-Departmental Collaboration – SWELL and Nursing

Dear Professor Steinbeck and Junior Nursing Students,

On behalf of the SWELL program, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to the junior nursing students for visiting us to share your expertise in nutrition and for your active participation in our exercise sessions. I also want to personally thank you Professor Steinbeck for your collaboration in making this successful exchange possible. The nutritional insights fit perfectly with our current testing as we conclude our Jackson Pollock skinfold testing. Your posters were perfect avenue as we work toward improving body composition, and we are currently entering our second round of testing to measure these improvements. Thus far, we have seen very positive results across the board. It has been a distinct pleasure working with you, Professor, to facilitate this exchange of knowledge. I am equally pleased that we have been able to provide SWELL exercises to help relieve the stress of your nursing students as they approach the end of the semester. Based on the numerous positive comments I have received from SWELL participants, I believe this initiative has the potential to become an annual project.

We wish you all the very best with the remainder of the semester and a restful, productive summer.

--Gary





**Holiday CRWC closed dates Special events not listed I will announce these times and dates.  
Mo., May 25, 2026**

**THE STAFF**

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**Biography Submitted by ..... Joni Lucas**  
**Feature Writer ..... Grace Brumley**  
**Article submitted by..... Lisa Wittman**  
**Feature Writer ..... Gary**  
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**Thanks to those who submitted wonderful articles to our SWELL newsletter**

## A Beautiful SWELL Morning

Based on data for Friday, May 1, 2026, in Dubuque, Iowa, the weather at 8:00 a.m. was cold and cloudy. Here are the specific conditions around that time: Temperature: Approximately 40 degrees F (With a real feel of 36 degrees). Conditions: Cloudy with a 51% chance of showers. Wind: North at 6 mph. Humidity: 72%. The morning generally consisted of a mix of clouds and sun, leading to cloudier skies later in the day.

So, I asked these SWELL Members how it was today? Their answer was it was nice. So, I guess it comes down to attitude. If you think the weather is nice then it is. Many of the SWELL members said thanks for coming Gary. My comment was I wouldn't miss it. Plus, after 39 years it's not really an effort it's part of my daily life. So, thank you SWELL members for making it happen remember the minimum number is 1. We had seventeen, not all in the picture.

But look at these smiling faces that tell the whole story. And there is a guy that you may not know? That's Dalen Maresh from my meditation class. I think Dylan was excited to be there. He will graduate next year and is from Cedar Rapids. Based on the forecast it is supposed to be sunny and 51 degrees on Monday so hopefully I'll see you all there. Have a great weekend.

