

# Dayton Daily News

## Hike Leaders Lead by Example

### Get Active

By Debbie Juniewicz - February 3, 2017  
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*Hike leaders fill an important role on the trail. CONTRIBUTED*

### **Learn How To Hike From the Pros.**

Little things add up, especially on the trail.

An apple core left behind, a wildflower picked, a few steps walked off trail to avoid a muddy puddle.

“Your actions and impact may seem small, but if the next 100 people hiking the trail did the same, imagine the impact,” said Angie Sheldon, Five Rivers MetroParks outdoor recreation coordinator.

“It’s a cumulative effect,” said Dayton Hikers founder Andy Niekamp. “We are very blessed to have an abundance of beautiful parks in the area – it’s a treasure – we need to protect them.”

Niekamp and Sheldon are among the many avid local hiker leaders who strongly support the “Leave No Trace Seven Principles” – guidelines designed by the Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics to sustain healthy, vibrant natural lands for all people to enjoy, now and into the future. Hike leaders are an integral part of sharing the Leave No Trace Seven Principles

“The group will follow your lead when it comes to etiquette, leadership and Leave No Trace,” Niekamp said. “Be a good role model.”

### **Lead by example**

Being a great hiker and being a great hike leader are two entirely different things. Great hike leaders, according to Niekamp, may vary in style but they share some common traits. They are enthusiastic, confident, motivating, look out for the best interest of the group and remain calm.

“As a hike leader, I think it’s important to make sure you are in tune with all the hikers,” Dayton Hikers hike leader Teresa Annarino said. “Not all are always as fast as the leader so you need to be aware of everyone’s speed.”

Awareness is critical for hike leaders.

“Your hikers will always be more tired, hungry, thirsty, cold or hot than you are,” Niekamp said. “Group members are often reluctant to ask for a rest break. Pay attention to your group.”

### **Learn and lead**

How do you become a great hike leader?

“Getting the basic and intermediate training from skilled sources is very important,” said Sharon Mullins, of the Miami Valley Outdoor Club. “I was able to gain a lot of these skills through Five Rivers MetroParks outdoor recreation classes that included backcountry leadership training. Understanding the safety and performance skills necessary for any backcountry experience is not only important for backpacking in the wilderness but can help a hike leader address issues that can come along on a hike at your local park.”

Classes and workshops are available locally at a variety of locations. And the learning never ends for hike leaders and hikers alike

“The most important thing you can do is to be prepared,” Sheldon said. “Get a map and learn about the area you’re going hiking. Planning and preparation is important to maximize your safety, minimize your impact and increase your comfort.”

## **Leave No Trace Seven Principles**

1. Plan Ahead and Prepare
2. Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces
3. Dispose of Waste Properly
4. Leave What You Find
5. Minimize Campfire Impacts
6. Respect Wildlife
7. Be Considerate of Other Visitors

## **Hiking Helpful Hints**

*Angie Sheldon, Five Rivers MetroParks*

**Stay on the trail:** Walk through – not around – mud puddles to avoid widening the trail and trampling fragile vegetation.

**Pack it in, pack it out:** Dispose of your trash in trash cans where available or take it home. Carry an extra little bag to pick up trash along the way and leave it better than you found it. This includes food wrappers and biodegradable materials such as banana peels and apple cores.

**Leave what you find:** So the next person can enjoy it. Take a picture, write about it in a journal. It could be a threatened or endangered flower. Imagine the impact if everyone picked one. Clean your boots after a hike to help avoid the spread of invasive species.

**Respect wildlife:** Keep wildlife wild. Observe animals from a distance and NEVER feed them.

**Keep dogs on leash on hikes:** So that they aren’t chasing wildlife. And be sure to pick up after them.

**Be respectful to other park visitors:** Make sure the fun you have isn’t taking away from someone else’s experience. Keep voices and noises low.

*Andy Niekamp, Dayton Hikers founder*

**Continually monitor the group.** Pay attention to your hikers. They will give you clues as to what will help them. Example: A talkative group that gets quiet probably needs a rest break.

**Adjust the pace.** Go at a slower pace if hikers are having trouble keeping up. Go at a temporarily quicker pace at the start of a winter hike to warm up your group.

**Take rest breaks.** Frequent breaks where people can rest, eat, drink and adjust gear are important. Make sure the last person who catches up has ample time for a break too.

**Wait at trail intersections.** Wait at all trail intersections if your group is getting spread out. You can ensure that everyone takes the correct trail. Many hikers have taken a wrong turn because the group did not wait for them.

## **Learn More**

- **Hiking 101:** March 7, 6:30 p.m., Dayton Metro Library - Belmont Branch, free and open to the public.
- **Hike Leader Training:** March 8, 7 p.m., Cox Arboretum MetroPark, free and open to the public.
- **Hiking 101:** March 9, 6:30 p.m., Dayton Metro Library - Vandalia Branch, free and open to the public.
- **Leave No Trace Trainer Course:** March 11-12, Lost Creek Reserve, Troy, fee: \$85 - registration required
- **Hiking 101:** March 20, 6 p.m., Dayton Metro Library - Huber Heights Branch, free and open to the public.

*More information about these events can be found at:*

*[www.outdooradventureconnection.com](http://www.outdooradventureconnection.com)*

*[www.metroparks.org](http://www.metroparks.org)*

*[www.daytonmetrolibrary.org](http://www.daytonmetrolibrary.org)*

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