

3The AUsome Social Group

Teen/Young Adult Recreation/Social Group

Sponsored by the Autism Society of Greater Madison (ASGM); <http://www.autismmadison.org/>

Contact: Nancy Alar, 3802 Gala Way, Cottage Grove, WI 53527

(608) 222-4378 or ausomesocialgroupmadison@gmail.com or Nancy.L.Alar@gmail.com

What: Little Amerricka Amusement Park Train Ride and Mini-golf
When: Saturday, July 23, 2011; 1:45 – 4:00 pm
Where: 700 E. Main Street, Marshall, Wi. (I94 East then North at Hwy 73 exit)
Cost: Admission to the park is free. Each AUsome member and their guests will get a free train ride and a round a mini-golf (Thanks to our Capital Times Kid’s Fund grant). Bring extra money if you want to ride other rides or get treats like soda, hot dogs or cotton candy.

This is a really great little amusement park with full size rides. In the summer it is open every day from 12 - 6 pm and admission to the park is free. There is a small concessions building where you can get sandwiches, soda, cotton candy, etc. and sit and eat. There is a small video game room in the corner.

We will meet in the concessions building by the T-shirt counter at 1:45. Please be on time so you can get your free tickets. We will ride the miniature train together at 2:15. The ride lasts about 20 minutes. Then we will go over and play miniature golf. After playing golf, we’ll go back to the concession building for a snack. Note that the train leaves the station every half hour (2:15, 2:45, 3:15, etc), so you may have to take a later train ride if you come late. Be sure to bring enough money to cover any extra rides and a snack. The place will probably be open even if it rains a bit because there are several buildings you can go into. If it looks like the weather is really terrible, we’ll move it to the next day (Sunday, July 24th).

They have a marvelous miniature train with 3+ miles of track. During the train ride you can see all kinds of animals including sheep, swans, llamas, a zebra, cows and several others. The train does have a fairly loud whistle so sit near the back if you’re noise sensitive. There is also a man-made tunnel that may have a minor diesel smoke problem if the wind is wrong. Other rides include a Ferris wheel, merry-go-round, tilt-a-whirl, scrambler, bumper boats, bumper cars, an overhead skyway ride and 3 small (but zippy) roller coasters. They don’t have the usual loud carnival music so only the train whistle might be a problem if you are noise sensitive. It is not usually crowded and you seldom have to wait in line to ride.

It is very clean and quite small. Some people have noted a smell from a local farm nearby in the past, but I visited there last week and there was no such smell. Families and siblings are welcome. There is a special area set aside for younger children with its own “kiddie” rides and a playground.

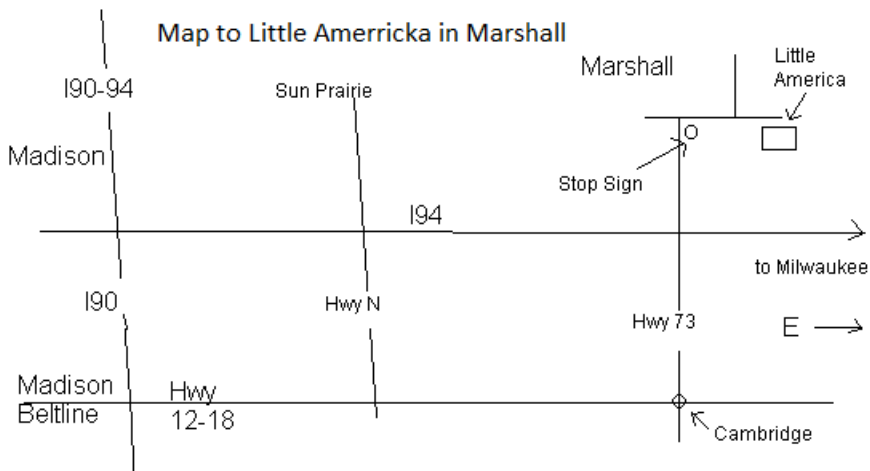
Call 608-655-3181 in Marshall or see their web site at www.littleamerricka.com if you want more details.

To get there, take I94 East from Madison (towards Milwaukee). Get off at the Hwy 73 exit and go North to Marshall. When you get to the (only) stop sign in the middle of town, turn right. Little Amerricka is about 3 blocks down on the right. If anyone has transportation problems, give me a call and I’ll try to help out. *See Map on following page*

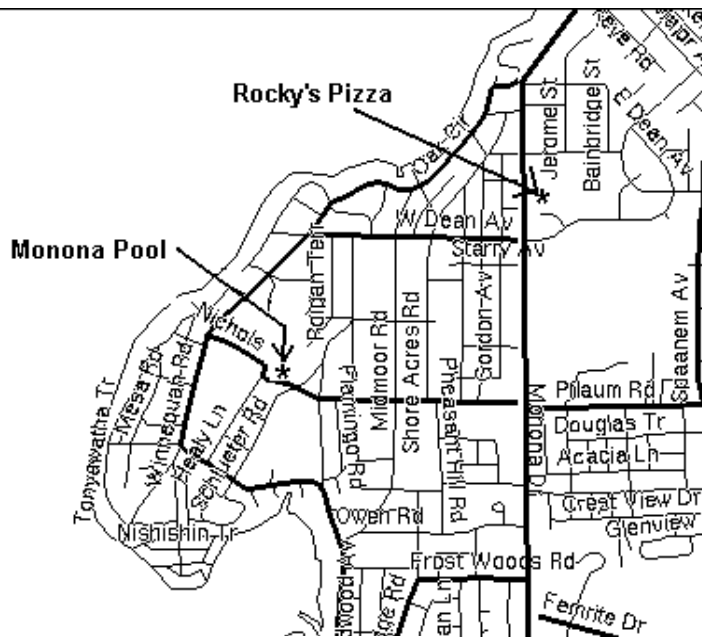
Important Items and Sensory Issues:

- ☺ The train does have a fairly loud whistle that can be heard all over the park. If you’re sensitive to noise, you should ride near the caboose.
- ☺ There is also a man-made tunnel that may have a minor diesel smoke problem if the wind is wrong.
- ☺ Bring sunscreen if it is sunny for the mini-golf.
- ☺ Please RSVP to (608) 222-4378 or Nancy.L.Alar@gmail.com so I have an idea who is coming.

Map to Little Amerricka for July 23, 2011



Map to Monona Pool and Rocky's on Monona Drive on Saturday, August 13th, 2011 -- Only \$5 for the whole family if ASGM member - \$10 for non-member families



Important Items and Sensory Issues:

- . Don't forget your suit and Towel(s)
- . Bring Sunscreen
- . Bring appropriate footwear for pool area
- . Bring pool toys if you have them.
- . Bring money for pizza at Rocky's

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Contact: Nancy Alar, 3802 Gala Way, Cottage Grove, WI 53527
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- What:** ASGM/AUsome combined Private Swimming Party at Monona Pool – Lunch at Rocky’s Pizza – **pre-registration required – see below**
- When:** August 13, 2011 (Saturday), 9:00-11:00 A.M.
- Where:** Monona Pool at 1011 Nichols Road in Monona. Pizza afterwards at Rocky's Pizza, 4556 Monona Drive. See map previous page.
- Cost:** Because we are combining this with the ASGM summer swim, **cost is \$5 per family group if member(s) of ASGM; \$10 per family if not ASGM member(s) – pay at the pool.** Also bring money for pizza at Rocky's

Swimming in the Monona Pool in August has become an ASGM/AUsome tradition.

The cost of swimming is cheaper for ASGM families (or families with a single ASGM member). So this might be a good time to join ASGM if you aren't a member already. Being an ASGM member also automatically gives you yearly membership in the Autism Society of Wisconsin. See the ASGM web site at <http://www.autismmadison.org/> for more details membership cost, how to join ASGM and more details about the August swim. You will also be able to join ASGM (and save \$5) at the pool as you check in.

Pre-registration is required because we need a count for the number of lifeguards. Call (608) 213-8519 or email autismmadison@gmail.com. But the cost is only \$5 for an entire family group for ASGM members - \$10 for non-member families. You pay when you get to the pool.

As before, we have been able to reserve the entire Monona pool. They have a large shallow end, diving boards and a great water slide. The pool is very large and pool toys are permitted. There are changing rooms with showers to get dressed and into your suits.

The Monona Pool is located Behind the Monona Community Center at 1011 Nichols Road (which becomes Pflaum Road at Monona Drive - see map above). Go West on Nichols road about 8 blocks from Monona Drive, past the Monona Library/City Hall sign, and down the hill. The pool is on the right. There is a big parking lot next to the pool entrance. **Don't forget your suit and towel!** Bring shampoo, a comb and an extra towel if you want to wash the chlorine out of your hair. Bring pool toys if you have them.

If you forget to pre-register and we don't have enough lifeguards, it will be first come, first admitted. However, parents or others who come but don't swim can be in the pool area and don't count toward the lifeguard requirement. There's a large selection of lounge chairs if you just want to come and "hang out" (you don't even have to change into a swimsuit). We will also have lemonade and snacks available near the pool. We can get in the changing room at 9:00. We have to be out of the pool at 11:00. After getting out of our suits, we'll head over to the Rocky Rococo's pizza on Monona Drive for lunch.

If the swimming gets rained out (horrors!!): Watch your email for info on this since the pool folks make cancellation decisions at the last minute. But the lifeguards don't let a little thing like cool and cloudy weather stop them. If you don't have email or the weather is "iffy", meet me in the pool parking lot at 9:00 and we'll make a final decision with those who show up. If the lifeguards cancel, I will probably suggest going to the Monona Library for a while and then lunch at Rocky's. We went to the Monona Library after the June 2006 weather crisis and it was a nice, quiet place.

See Map on previous page

What Happened at AUsome's Last Outings?

James Williams discussion on “Strategies for High School Success for individuals with ASD”; Sunday, May 8, 2011; 1:00 PM – 3:00 PM

A big thanks to the Capitol Centre Apartment building staff member Gina Carrao for arranging for us to use their community room and even providing some of the refreshments! We had 12 people turn out for James's presentation. About half of them were residents of Capitol Centre (as is my son, Matt Ward).

James gave a very interesting discussion about his adventures as an older high school student on the autism spectrum who had been home schooled for most of his life. He also shared lots of details about the “hidden curriculum” of the high school environment. James is a very powerful self-advocate. He emphasized that his strategies for succeeding in high school worked for him even though his approach was quite non-standard and wouldn't work for everyone on the spectrum.

His basic advice to all high school students was, “Find school peers willing to accept you and meet you half way and find a group willing to teach you the social rules.” In James case, these friends were almost all girls. James found that girls often accepted him because he was very honest and wasn't trying to become romantically involved with them.

Ironically, school administrators and teachers were often uncomfortable with his almost exclusively female friends. They questioned his motives and were afraid he would be a bad influence because he was older than most other students. He knows this was true because teachers told him so at his IEP meetings. The teachers thought he should be hanging out with guys. But James found that girls were the only ones willing to freely share information about the unwritten social rules. Also, James did experience a lot of bullying – most of it done by boys. He noted that bullying often starts the minute the teacher's back is turned and it can be very subtle.

Some of the unwritten social rules James learned from his female friends included:

1. Don't use your home phone to make calls to friends – use your cell phone (everyone has to have one!)
2. If you try to use the social rules your parents tell you about from their school days, they won't work. The rules are different now. Don't even tell your parents the details about your conversations with friends.
3. Text messages to your friends rather than calling most of the time. Texting has its own set of rules such as not using punctuation and learning the text language abbreviations (LOL, etc.).

James also explained that he thinks when it comes to school smarts and general intelligence, autistic brains work a bit differently, especially in prioritizing information and memorizing things. James found that he had a difficult time passing tests about facts. He could memorize lectures but could not take notes. He made up for his testing problems by writing really good papers and essay questions. Not everyone will have the same issues or solutions that James had for his high school issues. But everyone can be a self-advocate, work hard and try to figure out what unique strategies might work for them.

To learn more about James ideas, recommendations and his publications, see his web site at <http://www.jamesmw.com/>

There were lots of questions from the audience when James was done speaking. We ended up staying an extra half hour just to finish all the discussion. Also thanks to the Capital Times Kid's Fund grant for paying James speaking fee and travel expenses.

ASGM family Picnic; Saturday, June 18, 2011; 12:30 PM – 3:00 PM; Warner Park

This activity was a joint effort with the AUsome Group and general ASGM membership. Susannah Peterson (ASGM staff person) did a great job setting things up (she was out at the park at 7 a.m.!) She had “reserved” a lovely shady spot under some big trees with 3 convenient picnic tables with white plastic table cloths. It also pays to have a weatherman (David George from Channel 15) as our new ASGM president. The weather for our picnic was just perfect!

David George set up the grills for us and served as our chief chef. Hot dogs always taste best outside! We enjoyed relaxing good company and conversation. I think we had about 30 – 40 people show up throughout the afternoon. We had lots of goodies with soda, water and lemonade. Thanks to all who brought food to share.

Did I mention the weather was just perfect? It was sunny with a nice light breeze. An added bonus for our day was the fact that the Madison Blues Music festival was happening at the same time just across the parking lot from us. We could hear the live blues bands, but it was far enough away that the crowds didn't intrude into our space.

We had lots of outdoor games. We tried flying a kite, but the wind just wasn't quite strong enough. The beanbag toss the Heibels bought was a big hit. Who knew there are actually regulation bean bag tossing boards (which we used), official rules and tournaments for this sport? The thing I enjoyed most was making bubbles. The breeze was just perfect for bubble blowing. I'm just a kid at heart and have collected a large assortment of bubble blowing equipment just for such opportunities. We went through 2 gallons of bubble solution. See pictures below.



Important Information:

1. Visit <http://www.autismmadison.org/> for other services and activities sponsored by the Autism Society of Great Madison (ASGM). Be sure to sign up for their email group to get the “News you can Use” messages sent out by Susannah Peterson. There are autism related activities happening almost every month now. The 3rd Tuesday of the month at 7pm is either a parent support group meeting (Jan, March, May, July, Sept., Nov.) or a special presentation (Feb., April, June, August, Oct.) at the Midvale Community Lutheran Church at 4329 Tokay Blvd (the corner of Midvale Blvd. and Tokay Blvd. on Madison's west side).

AUSome Social Group Philosophy and Ground Rules

Group Sponsor:

The AUSome Social Group is sponsored by the Autism Society of Greater Madison (ASGM). **It is highly recommended that you join the Autism Society of Greater Madison. You should at least subscribe to the Autism Society of Greater Madison newsletter (subscription cost is only \$5) if you are not a chapter member.** It is possible that Madison chapter membership may be required in the future as the AUSome group becomes larger and requires more resources. You can get more information about the Madison Chapter (including an extensive autism resource list), by calling (608) 213-8519 or sending a note to ASGM, 2935 Fish Hatchery Rd #101, Madison, WI 53711

See the ASGM website at <http://www.autismmadison.org/> for membership information and a link to the AUSome Group web pages (under the **Support** tab at the top of the page). If you join the Autism Society of Greater Madison, this automatically gives you the chapter newsletter plus membership in the state (ASW) Autism Society so you will get their mailings as well. (However, if you join just the national Autistic Society, you will not get state and local mailings).

Group Purpose:

The AUSome group was organized to provide recreation and social opportunities for people ages 12 and over who are challenged by sensory/communication issues related to Autism/Asperger's/PDD/Tourette's. However, anyone is welcome to join the activities. I try to set up activities that allow for social interaction between group members and between parents and siblings of the group.

The AUSome Newsletter:

The AUSome Group has a separate newsletter that is sent out every other month, containing details for the next 2 outings and a summary of what happened the past 2 months. The AUSome newsletter will be sent out at least a week in advance of the next outing (I hope). Some things may be planned with short notice if something interesting comes up. If you have an e-mail address and are OK with receiving the newsletter that way, let me (Nancy Alar) know. It saves time and postage if notification can just be sent electronically. I will maintain a mailing list of participants, and will verify this list annually – usually in January in conjunction with a call about tickets to the juggling show. Our AUSome newsletter is also available on the web at <http://autismmadison.org/category/ausome-social-group-newsletters/>

General Activity Plans:

The general plan is to have an activity about once a month that will last from 2 to 4 hours. The target day will be the first Saturday of the month. However, this is subject to schedule conflicts and availability of interesting activities. Activities that we have done include bowling, miniature golf, gymnastics, movies, a talent show, art gallery visit, fossil hunt, Little Amerricka (a local amusement park), swimming, horse back riding, Go Cart driving, farm market, airplane rides, pottery making and a limousine ride. Each January we attend the 47th annual Madfest Juggling show. In August we have a private pool party at the Monona Pool. Every November we have “video game night”. If you are especially interested in a particular activity or have other suggestions, please let me know.

Sensory Issues:

Every effort will be made to accommodate sensory issues by limiting cigarette smoke, strong odors, unusual lighting, large crowds and high noise levels where possible. If an activity might involve some of the sensory problems mentioned above, they will be described in the AUSome newsletter. It will not be possible to accommodate everyone's needs all the time so individuals must decide their tolerance levels for each activity. Please let me know if you have any special requests in this area. Also, please be sensitive to requests from group members who have special sensory needs (such as problems with others chewing gum.).

Logistics:

Some individuals may need to arrange for a support person to accompany them. Please use your best judgment in this area. Transportation will be the responsibility of each individual. However, effort will be made to provide help with transportation by designating central meeting points, etc. **Please call me, Nancy Alar, (608) 222-4378 or e-mail me at ausomesocialgroupmadison@gmail.com if you have transportation problems, and I'll try to help work out a way for you to get there.**

Since these activities are loosely organized social outings, each person participates at their own risk.