

Story of Thrive! Center and Thrive! Park



by
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Founder, Thrive! – Building a Thriving Future
Founder, HealthePeople – Building a Healthy Future
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Former Senior Executive, U.S. Federal Government



Nelson, WI

University Park, MD

**DEDICATION AND THANKS
TO**

*People who help build,
achieve, and sustain a
healthy and thriving
future for all forever.*

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Story of Thrive! Center and Thrive! Park

The Thrive! Center. Since Chris (Gary “Chris” Christopherson) moved to Nelson in 2012, The Thrive! Center serves as physical and virtual space for GChris Sculpture, HealthePeople and Thrive!



Visitors can view GChris sculpture and tour the workshop/studio. Visitors can learn more about the sculpture Chris creates and how he creates them.

Visitors can visit and meet with Chris and learn about, discuss and/or join Thrivism and Thrive Endeavor. Visitors can discuss several Thrive! nonfiction and fiction books written by him. Visitors can learn about overall Thrive! vision, mission and strategy.

In his second-floor office in the restored/renovated Thrive! Center farmhouse, Chris continues to design Thrive! sculpture. He continues to write books and articles in support of HealthePeople and Thrive! He continues to develop the websites and blogs that support Thrive!, HealthePeople and Thrive! Sculpture. He continues to support Thrive! on wide range of eMedia sites.

In Thrive! Park and in the restored/renovated Thrive! Center, Chris continues to strategize ways to fulfill the Thrive! mission and achieve the Thrive! vision of “all thrive forever.”



The Thrive! Center and Thrive! Park, Summer, Nelson (WI)

Finding and Acquiring Thrive! Center Property. Around the year 2000, Chris was looking for property in the Nelson (WI) area. It was to be a place to live and work and to enjoy some leisure time. At the time, he was still living in the greater Washington, DC area and working as a Senior Executive for the U.S. Federal government. Thrive! had not yet emerged.

In 2003, his mother, Irene Christopherson, called him one day and indicated that there was a property for sale that might interest him. She hesitated to tell him as she was not sure it was a good idea.

Chris quickly traveled out to check the property. When he got there, he found the buildings were a disaster. House was a mess, except for one room. The question. Could it be saved? Should it be saved? Barn was falling apart with the roof and floor both in terrible shape. The side facing the bluff had caved in. Beehouse (not yet known as a beehouse) had caved in roof and floor. The barn was the only building Chris knew he would save. Buildings were worth less than nothing.

Then Chris turned and focused on the land. 29.5 acres. Heavy oak, shagbark hickory and black walnut forest. 500 foot tall Mississippi River bluffs. 20+ mile views of Mississippi River Valley. Land was beautiful with enormous potential as natural habitat.

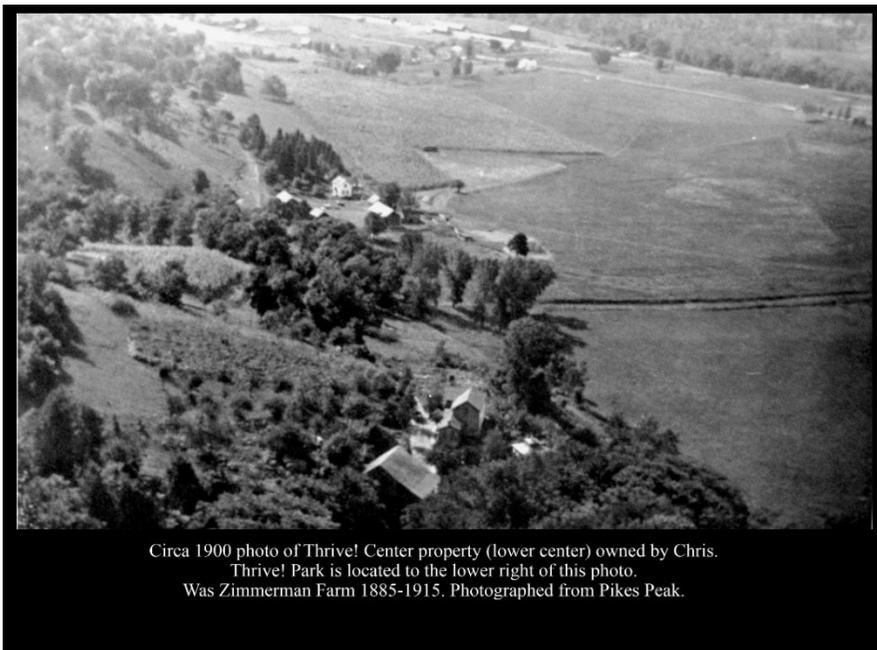
He was convinced. Buy it for the land. Figure out what to do with buildings later. Setting aside any decision about saving buildings, he purchased Thrive! Center property in 2003 while still living in greater Washington area. He proceeded to renovate and restore the three buildings. Most work was completed before 2012. In 2012, he sold his home in greater Washington area in and moved to Thrive! Center property.



The Thrive! Center and Thrive! Park, Winter, Nelson (WI)

The Land. The patent for the land (then 160 acres) dates to 1862 and was granted to Andrew and Susan Hughes for \$1,000. Zimmerman family bought 40 acres for \$150 in 1883 and were living here by 1885. Property was owned by Zimmerman family until 1915. That is the last we know of the family. It was reduced to 29.5 acres in 1972 when the land was sold by the Castleberg family and the bluff top field and northern Sister were kept by the Castleberg family. Chris paid \$127,000 for the 29.5 acres and buildings in 2003.

The Initial Settlers. The Zimmerman family were first people to settle on property. A circa 1900 photo of property from Pikes Peak blufftop shows all three buildings, an orchard above the house and fields to the south. There was also a blufftop field (sold 1972) that was serviced by steep bluff road, now referred to as Bluff Hiking Road.



Circa 1900 photo of Thrive! Center property (lower center) owned by Chris.
Thrive! Park is located to the lower right of this photo.
Was Zimmerman Farm 1885-1915. Photographed from Pikes Peak.

Circa 1900 Photo of Thrive! Center Property and Environs, Nelson (WI)

It is likely two-story barn was first building built, often the case with early farms. Also, barn construction is mostly hand hewn beams while house and beehouse are all sawed lumber. Barn is small basic barn that probably housed couple of horses and maybe couple of cows and other livestock. The Zimmerman family may or may not have lived in barn while house was being built. The southeast corner of upper barn was framed in and covered with lathe and plaster.

They were beekeepers and probably made part of their livelihood from honey bees. Beehouse is unique and very large (16' x 16') with spaces for 27 hives. There was also a large cupola to help ventilate the heat in the summer. The beehouse had an internal chimney which was used to "smoke" the bees and make it easier to service them.

The house is two-story frame house with a stone foundation. In the basement is a cistern for water and a root cellar.

Saving the Historic Buildings. Shortly after 2003, Chris began extensive renovations of 1885 era buildings. Most of Chris' family thought house should be bulldozed. A new house built. The cost of either renovation of the 1885 house or a new energy efficient house would be similar.

First question was whether there was enough of the house to save. After a lot of interior demolition and removal of two layers of siding, Chris found original 135 year old siding, covered since 1902. Most floors were restorable. The original two-foot thick stone foundation was fairly sound. The rest? Not so good. Chris decided to rescue the house.

What partially drove Chris' decision on preserving buildings was that so many pre 1900 building were being lost. Along with the buildings, a substantial part of history was being lost. Chris believed there was substantial value in preserving key parts of history. In this case, history was a small bluffside farm built by a family over 100 years earlier.

Renovation/restoration strategy for the house was to preserve as much as possible and have it continue to look like 1885 but with modern mechanicals (heating, air conditioning, electrical, plumbing), new drywall, refinished floors, new roof, and new doors and windows. All that took almost several years to get done. While he contracted for much of the renovation and restoration work, Chris traveled several times each year to do parts of demolition and renovation. It was essentially done by 2012 when Chris moved back from Washington (DC).



Thrive! Center 1885 Era House, Renovated/Restored

The barn was one building Chris always planned to save. When he bought it, roof was weakened and the center of the roof sloped downward. Side of barn toward the bluff had caved in from pressure of the bluffside. Lower level had dirt floor and the woodchuck. Woodchuck had to be safely evicted. Upper level floor and support system had to be replaced. When fully restored/renovated, barn had new roof bracing, new metal roof, partial replacement siding from similar age barn, new upper floor and floor joists, new concrete floor in lower level, and a new storage section on upper level.

Beehouse is a unique story of a unique building. When property was purchased, center of the roof had caved in and floor and support system had caved in. No one knew it was a beehouse. All that was known is that it had 27 small openings for a purpose unknown. Initial approach was just to protect the building by putting on a new roof and floor system.



Thrive! Center 1885 Era Barn, Renovated/Restored

Later, while working in the beehouse, Chris noticed that the old stone chimney did not open through the roof but did open inside. There was a five-foot high space underneath where a stove fed into the stone chimney. Looking at the chimney and the 27 “holes”, he finally figured out it was a beehouse. Apparently, chimney and stove were used to “smoke” the bees, making it easier when working with the honey bees.

Talking to many beekeepers, including European beekeepers, the story unfolded. Likely it was a Swiss type beehouse. Honeybees would have been brought to the U.S. from Europe. Honeybees are not native to the U.S. It housed 27 beehives and was more than twice the size of most European beehouses. The extra space was likely used to process honey and wax (for things like candles). None of U.S. bee people had ever seen such a beehouse in the U.S.



Thrive! Center 1885 Era Beehouse, Renovated/Restored

Later, Chris found photo of the property taken from Pikes Peak around 1900. There was the beehive with cupola. As final renovation/restoration, Chris built a new cupola, slid it up onto the roof, and installed it. All by himself. He considered allowing a local beekeeper to use the beehive but decided that probably was not workable. He had new metal roof installed. It now houses GChris sculptures as part of GChris Sculpture Studio/Gallery.

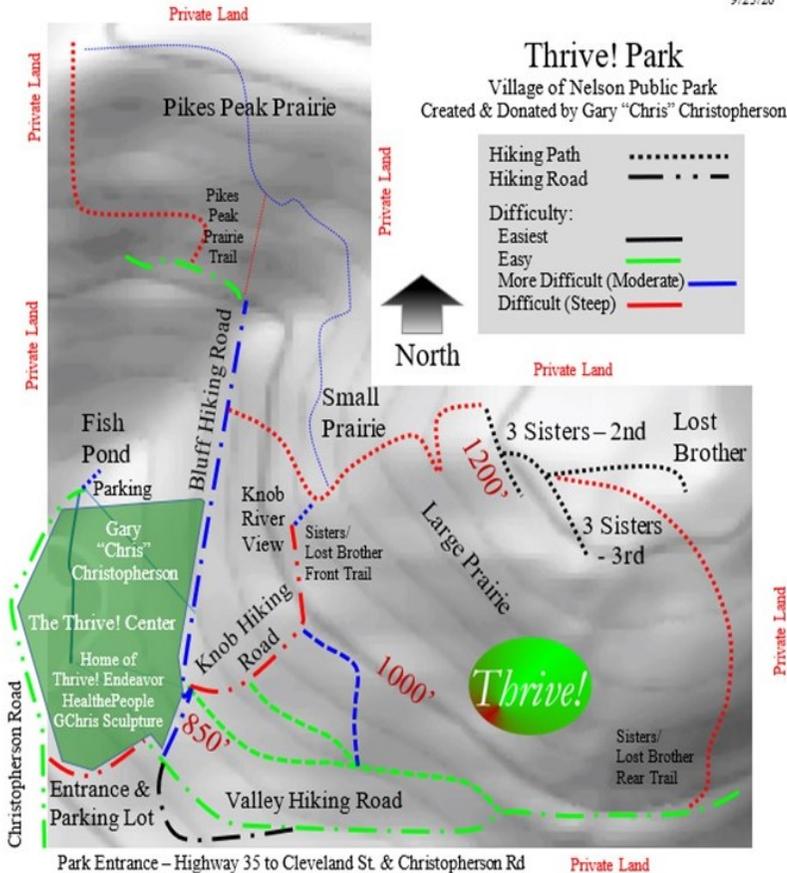
A bit of irony. One day, Chris noticed a honeybee swarm. Soon they moved in through a crack between fireplace chimney and living room wall. Many efforts were made to encourage them to leave. To no avail. They really liked their new home. Finally, a local beekeeper and Chris suited up, opened living room wall, and carefully vacuumed out the bees. They were pretty docile. Only one bee sting for Chris. About 95% of bees were saved and placed in new beehive. Beekeeper estimated about 15-20,000 bees were in the wall. Irony is honeybees choosing house wall when beehouse was just 20 feet away. Living room wall, warm in winter and cool in summer, was their better choice. Swarm had a very smart scout bee.

Creating the Hiking Road and Path System. To give access to bluffs, prairies and forest and build a good hiking road and trail system, Chris made best use of existing farm and logging roads. They were cleaned and extended to make them more user-friendly year-round. But how to get to the bluff tops? The old bluff farm road was no longer usable as it went partly through a neighbor's property. Solution was to build a hiking trail system off the improved farm and logging roads. [See map below.]

Over a few years, Chris built system of hiking paths linked to farm and logging roads and going up to the two sets of bluff tops that were part of his land. Key was to build them so they required as little maintenance as possible. Using natural openings in forest and prairies. This is where partnership between Chris and deer began. Chris used deer trails and kept them clear. Later, deer used his trails and helped keep them clear. A symbiotic relationship.

New Thrive! Park [Nelson, WI] – Open for Public Hiking/Walking
 Maps available @ Cleveland St./Christopherson Rd Entrance and www.ThrivePark.org
 Leave no trace. Please take out what you bring in.

9/23/20



More information (downloadable map, photos, prairie restoration, description) @ www.ThrivePark.org

Thrive! Park is east of Highway 35 in Nelson (WI). Take Cleveland St. toward bluffs. As you enter woods, turn left on Christopherson Road. Parking lots on right and up by Fish Pond. Park entrance and road/trail markings are just left of first parking lot.

As shown on map, Park consists of hiking roads (dash-dotted lines) going along bluff side and back through valley. Also, there are several hiking trails (dotted lines) that go to restored bluff and prairie areas and can be accessed off the main hiking roads. Two loop trail sets, including Eagle Trail, can be accessed off main hiking roads.

Main parking area (Christopherson Road / Cleveland Street) to Sisters and Lost Brother Bluffs via a) front trail via Knob View Road or b) rear trail via Valley Road. Elevation change – About 400'. Distance – About half mile with elevation.

Thrive! Park is a public park. No hunting or trapping since this is a park and wildlife safety area. No fires. No vehicles (motorized or non-motorized) except for handicapped access. Please take out what you bring in. Please do not trespass on neighbors' private land.

Responding to visitors' questions, Thrive! Center (home to GChris Sculpture & Thrive! Endeavor) is just outside Park's west edge. To visit, best contact Chris first at GChris@GChris.com or 301-318-3760. More at www.GChris.org and www.ThriveEndeavor.org

Thrive! Park of the Village of Nelson and created and donated by Gary "Chris" Christopherson

Restoring the Bluff Prairies and Tops. Chris' bluff prairies and tops were nothing like they were in 1950s, let alone 1880s. Many trees, especially cedar, had grown in. Lots of buckthorn and prickly ash had grown in. Chris decided to do prairie restoration on the two bluff tops and prairies. [See photo showing after and before restoration.]



Starting in 2015, Chris started prairie restoration with substantial funding from US Fish and Wildlife Service and Buffalo County and his in-kind contribution. He contracted with 'Ku Le Forestry (LaCrosse (WI)). This was extremely challenging work. Chris oversaw the work. This first effort was finished by December 2015. It included bluff tops and prairies of two of the Three Sisters and the Lost Brother and bluff top and prairie on east side of Pikes Peak. Chris worked with neighbor Dennis Hetrick who did similar work on west side (front) of Pikes Peak, owned by the Hetrick family.

In 2019 with this land now being Thrive! Park and owned by the Village of Nelson, the Village with funding support from Chris, US Fish and Wildlife Service and Buffalo County did second phase of restoration. Focus was on forest below Sisters and Lost Brother bluff prairies. Chris oversaw the work. Quercus Land Stewardship worked to create transition forest, removing all brush and trees except oak and shagbark hickory. A very old large birch tree was kept that was deep in the forest. A prairie burn was done on main prairie below and on top of Sisters and Lost Brother.

Creating GChris Sculpture Studio and Gallery. When Chris acquired and renovated/restored the Thrive! Center property, he intended to use much of the space for GChris Sculpture Studio/Gallery. Over years, he refined spaces to accommodate workshop/studio and multiple galleries. All are open to the public and can be visited.

GChris Sculpture Studio/Gallery occupies all 1885 era buildings, including farmhouse, barn and beehouse. Sculpture also occupies two cargo containers he installed. All are located on 3.6 acres retained by Chris. House's first floor is main display space for the gallery and ouses about 50 sculpture at any one time.



GChris Sculpture Studio and Gallery

In recent years, Chris has joined the Fresh Art Tour. The Tour features local artists and allows visitors to tour the artists' studios and galleries. In Chris' case and as the southern most site for the Tour, the Tour makes full use of the Thrive! Center buildings and outdoor space and allows visitors to experience over 100 GChris sculptures.

On upper floor of farmhouse is Chris' office. Sometimes by hand and sometimes using laptop computer using CorelDraw software. Mostly in later years using software, Chris can better manipulate designs, work with different dimensions and proportions, reduce errors, and better use expensive copper and American black walnut.

What may now be Chris' best studio/workshop ever is in lower barn. It was renovated specifically for this purpose. In it are several of his most recent sculptures and any sculpture in the process of being created.



Chris in GChris Sculpture Workshop/Studio, Lower Barn

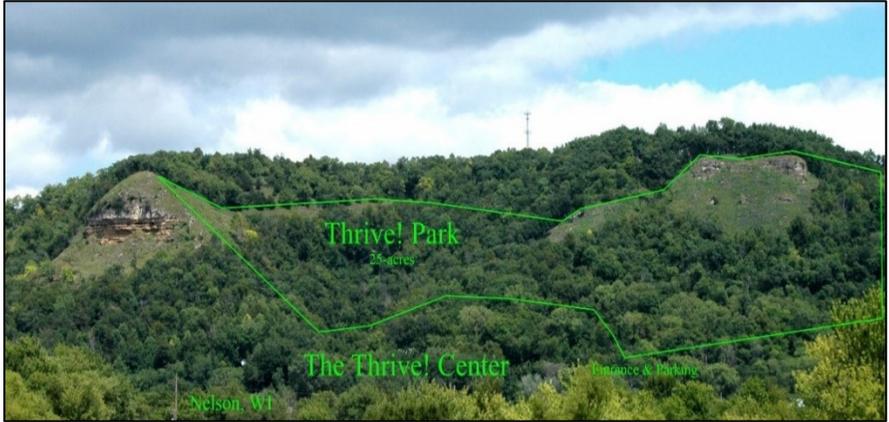
To create sculpture, Chris has many tools. Stationary power tools including a large lathe, a radial arm saw, grinders, a planer, two band saws (one for wood and one for metal) and a drill press. Hand power tools are many, including jig saw and random orbital sander. For brazing and coloring copper, he uses an oxyacetylene torch. Also, in the workshop/studio are materials – copper sheet, wire and rod and American black walnut wood – that he uses to create sculpture.



“envision earth embrace, sustained & thriving”, GChris Sculpture

Creating and Donating Thrive! Park. Chris wanted to find a way to preserve and protect as much of Thrive! Center property as he could. He explored wide range of options to protect the land. The only option that could protect the property in perpetuity was to make it a public park. He looked into who might be willing to accept and maintain the property as a public park. He talked to Buffalo County and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Neither was sufficiently interested. Chris soon settled on Village of Nelson in which property is located.

After series of discussions, Chris offered and agreed to donate 25+ acres of his bluff and prairie land for new public park named Thrive! Park. Village of Nelson agreed. Agreement was signed March 2015. After prairie restoration was completed, Chris told them we should move to complete the transfer by February 2016. In 2016, the property was transferred and Thrive! Park was born.



Summer Photo of Thrive! Park, View from Mississippi River.



Winter Photo of Thrive! Park, View from Mississippi River.

In 2016, Chris finished the Thrive! Park setup including signage. He donated and installed much of the hiking road and trail signage. Trails were marked with blue paint and yellow tape. A large Thrive! Park sign with the park's name and indicating Chris as the donor was provided by the Village. In 2016, the Village installed a parking area and park entrance for Thrive! Park. A second parking area is just below the Fish Pond.

Chris created and maintains the Thrive! Park website - ThrivePark.org. Chris also created the Thrive! Park map and handout to help guide visitors.

To make the park more user friendly, new and easier trails have been built. Chris added a loop trail on park's west side. Eagle Trail, a loop trail system, was built as Max Benish's Eagle Scout project by he and Alma (WI) Boy Scouts. They also added benches. Alma (WI) High School Shop class, with materials supplied by Chris, built two picnic tables and two swinging benches that are now in the park. Chris also donated two park benches which are located on top the Sisters and Lost Brother bluffs. The Nelson Cheese Factory also donated a park bench for the Fish Pond.



Donated Memorial Park Bench on Sisters Bluff Top, Thrive! Park

One of the favorite sites for children (and adults) is the Fish Pond. Currently, it is home to several hundred small fish and, at times, dozens of frogs and tadpoles. Built in the 1970s, the 30' by 30' pond is spring fed. Near it is an old stone spring house with an active spring as well. Though the pond is less than three feet deep currently, the fish keep surviving and have since 2003. The spring at upper end of pond likely plays an important role in fish survival. As long as the fish survive, the Fish Pond will be kept pretty much as it is.

Since its inception, Chris has played the role of “first volunteer”. He has done much of the park’s trail maintenance. The Village of Nelson will be taking on more and more of the maintenance work as time passes. He serves as a volunteer guide to help park visitors make best use of the park.



View of Mississippi River Valley from Sisters & Lost Brother Bluff Tops, Thrive! Park

Thrive! and HealthePeople Public Policy Mission.

Building on his health work going back to late 1970s, Chris continues the HealthePeople effort as an important element of the overall Thrive! effort. He founded and leads HealthePeople to help build a healthy and thriving future for individual persons and communities (local, State, regional, countries, world) (HealthePeople.com)



HealthePeople focuses on why and how to build, achieve and sustain a successful health system, healthy people and healthy future. HealthePeople speaks to the importance of, and walks through how to use ideal health systems, healthy behavior and person-centered health. With these and using HealthePeople as a vision, mission and strategy, HealthePeople describes how to build, achieve and sustain healthy people, communities, countries and world.

Starting around 2006, Chris' Thrive! work begins and focuses on the highly ambitious mission and vision of building a thriving future for all forever. He founded and leads Thrive! which helps create, manage and sustain large positive change and build a thriving future for all (persons, local, State, regions, countries, world). (ThriveEndeavor.org) It is the overarching vision, mission and strategy within which Chris' efforts continue.



Part of Thrive!, Thrivism is a path to, belief in, and vision of thriving future for all – all thrive forever. It is hopeful path. Inspiring vision. Positive belief system. Positive way of life.

Chris asks people to join the Thrive! Endeavor by helping build thriving future for our whole world. Start with who and what you care about and move from vulnerable to surviving to thriving. At this time in human history when we desire to thrive, when we need to survive, when our future is most endangered, and when we are most capable, the Thrive! Endeavor, all of us together, can and must build, achieve, and sustain this future for all forever.

The Thrive! Center is the home for HeathePeople and Thrive! Visitors are welcome to come to the Center to learn more about both and to discuss them with Chris.

Appendix A. Handout for Thrive! Center



Welcome to The Thrive! Center

E298 Cleveland St, Nelson WI 54756

The Thrive! Center, home of **GChris Sculpture**, **Thrivism**, **Thrive! Endeavor**, and **HealthePeople**, is on Mississippi River bluffside in restored 1880s farmhouse, barn and beehouse nestled 100 feet above Village of Nelson (WI). Is surrounded by **Thrive! Park** [ThrivePark.org], 25 acre, bluffside, public park donated by Chris.

Gary "Chris" Christopherson, founder of **Thrive!** and **HealthePeople** and sculptor of **GChris Sculpture**, lives and works here.

Open to public. Informal hours. To visit **Center**, best to contact Chris at GChris@GChris.com or 301-318-3760 to ensure **Center** is open.



Center is not-for-profit. **Thrive!**, **Thrivism**, and **HealthePeople** services are free. **GChris** sculptor's pay goes to Thrive! Scholarship.

More info: ThriveEndeavor.org, Thrivism.world, HealthePeople.com or GChris.com.

For more info or to visit, free to contact Chris at GChris@GChris.com or 301-318-3760.

The Thrive! Center



Thrive! Sculpture by GChris. Want to experience and interact with 200+ abstract sculptures. Copper and wood. Sizes from foot to dozen feet. Some make sounds. Some move physically or conceptually. Sculptor's payments donated to Thrive! Scholarship Fund. GChris.com

Thrive! Want better future for your family and friends, community, world? Want more, a thriving future? Thrive! Endeavor is call for better, thriving future for all. Thrive! – vision and mission for those wanting to build thriving future for all. All Thrive! services free. ThriveEndeavor.org

Thrivism. Want to live on path to, belief in, and vision of thriving future for all? It is hopeful path. Inspiring vision. Positive belief system. Positive way of life. All Thrivism free. Thrivism

HealththePeople. Want healthy future for your family and friends, community, country and world? Want best personal, community or country health system? HealththePeople – vision, integrated strategy and effective reform to build accessible, affordable and high-quality health systems for all everywhere. All HealththePeople services free. HealththePeople.com

Thrive! Park. Want to see great scenic views of Mississippi River valley. Walk/hike extensive bluff side/top roads and trails year-round. Experience goat prairie and forest restoration on bluff sides and tops. Hiking roads go along bluff side. Hiking trails go to restored bluff and prairie areas. ThrivePark.org

Historic 1885 Era Bluffside Farm. Want to tour fully renovated/restored house, barn and beehouse with views of Mississippi River and bluff. Great scenic views. Learn about life on small bluffside farm in 1880s.

Copyright - Gary "Chris" Christopherson

Appendix B. About Chris - A Life in Pursuit of Thriving for All

The story of Chris is contained in his book - [A Life in Pursuit of Thriving for All](#) available via [Amazon.com](#) and as free download via [GChris.com](#)

A Life in Pursuit of Thriving for All

The story of and by Chris and his lifelong pursuit of a thriving future - all thrive forever.



“all thrive forever”, Thrive! Sculpture by GChris

Gary “Chris” Christopherson
Founder, Thrive! – Building a Thriving Future
Founder, HealthePeople – Building a Healthy Future
Sculptor, Thrive! Sculpture by GChris
Former Senior Executive, U.S. Federal Government



Nelson, WI

University Park, MD

Chris' [Gary "Chris" Christopherson] lifelong pursuit of a thriving future – all thrive forever - begins and ends in rural western Wisconsin and includes over 20 years in greater Washington (DC) area.

Chris has spent his college and adult life preparing for and pursuing a thriving future for all. The powerful vision is "**All Thrive Forever**"[®]. "All" is every human, all other creatures and Earth. "Thrive" is everybody and everything doing well. "Forever" is as long a future as possible.

At this time in human history when we desire to thrive, when we need to survive, when our future is most endangered, and when we are most capable, **Thrive!**[®], all of us together, can and must build, achieve and sustain this thriving future. This is why Chris created Thrive! and **Thrive! Endeavor**[®] and why he continues its mission.

ThriveEndeavor.org

Chris dedicated his life to public service in a career that spanned over 30 years. Throughout his career, he worked toward building a thriving and surviving future. Initially focused on health (**HealthThePeople**[®]). Later focused on everything that determines survival and thriving. (Thrive!)

Much of this public service, as Senior Executive, was with U.S. Federal government. Much took place in Washington (DC). HealthThePeople.com

- Acting Assistant Secretary, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, and Senior Advisor for Health Affairs, DoD (Department of Defense)
- Senior Advisor to Chief Operating Officer, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services
- Senior Advisor to Under Secretary for Health, Veterans Health Administration.
- Associate Director, Office of Presidential Personnel, White House.
- Senior Fellow / Scholar-in-Residence, Institute of Medicine, National Academy of Sciences
- Fellow, National Academy of Public Administration
- Deputy Director, Quality Improvement Group, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.
- Chief Information Officer, Veterans Health Administration
- Senior Advisor for Force Health Protection, Assistant Secretary for Reserve Affairs, DoD

- Director of Health Legislation, U.S. House Select Committee on Aging.

Chris received his Bachelor's Degree in Political Science (1970) and his Master's Degree in Urban and Regional Planning (1974) from University of Wisconsin - Madison. During 1981-83, he did doctoral work in health policy and management at John Hopkins University School of Public Health.

Chris created the Thrive! Center. Created from restored/renovated 1885 farm with farmhouse, beehouse and barn and located on Mississippi River bluffside in rural Wisconsin. Center houses Thrive!, HealthePeople and Thrive! Sculpture by GChris. Center is nestled within public Thrive! Park. Chris created and donated Thrive! Park.

Chris is a sculptor of abstract art, creating over 200 "Thrive! Sculptures by GChris" over 50 years. He has had his own galleries. He wrote and illustrated several fiction books for children and people of all ages. All sculpture and fiction supports the Thrive! vision and mission.

GChris.com

Chris created Thrive! to push a positive view and future. Thrive! manifests itself in Chris' many nonfiction books, websites, blogs, and eMedia messages and images. All advance the Thrive! vision and mission.

All this is for and is the thriving future Chris has been and continues pursuing with Thrive!. Though time is running out, Chris still has hope. Chris still believes that humans can move beyond current selfishness and shortsightedness and build and achieve a thriving future for all. All Thrive Forever!