

# directions



The journal of the Association of Nature Center Administrators

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RECYCLE THIS NEWSLETTER -  
GIVE IT TO A FRIEND

## REsurrection of EXperience

**Robert Mercer**  
Director/Naturalist  
Silver Lake Nature Center

I wish to provide a  
different  
spin

from the insightful and thought provoking ANCA Special Issue, the "Extinction of Experience" written by Ken Finch and Gordon Maupin. The issue sat in my "to read" pile for a couple weeks. Just before I finally took the time, there was an experience that shook some of the foundation of these



*Mentoring begins at any age.*

articles.

It was an early summer evening. After finishing the keynote speech to a small crowd of volunteers at a nearby facility, I joined their bird walk. As we moseyed around waiting for the walk to start, a tall, "young boomer" generation, man dressed in a crisp white shirt, dress pants, reptile skinned shoes and a large gold ring somehow

joined the aging boomer, blue-jeaned group. Credit be given, everyone in the group spent time making him feel welcome and sharing things with him and he willingly took the stroll.

He marveled at every little discovery. We gazed for minutes at the barn swallows darting about. "They are beautiful." He exclaimed several  
(continued on page 4)

*Extinction is not something to contemplate; it is something to rebel against. -Jonathon Schell*

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For more information on ANCA call our toll-free number:  
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# Rich Patterson to Become President of National Organization



*Congratulations Rich!*

Indian Creek Nature Center Director Rich Patterson, of Cedar Rapids, was recently elected Third Vice President of the Outdoor Writers Association of American (OWAA). He will become President in three years and Chairman of the Board in four.

OWAA is an international professional organization of about 1,800 educators, authors, photographers, artists, videographers, and others. Its mission is to improve the professional skills of members, set high ethical and communications standards, and encourage public enjoyment and conservation of natural resources.

"This position gives me the opportunity to interact with conservationists and communicators from across the country and has brought national attention to the Nature Center," said Patterson.

Rich is a New Jersey native and graduate of the University of Idaho's College of Natural Resources. He has been employed by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and the US Forest Service.

He served as Director of the Dillon Nature Center in Hutchinson, Kansas before assuming his position in Cedar Rapids in 1978. Rich is one of the founders of ANCA and served on the Board of Directors. He and his wife, Marion, have two grown children.

## ANCA is seeking NOMINATIONS!

Do you know someone who is outstanding in the Nature Center field? If so, they probably deserve to be nominated for the ANCA Leadership Award.

For more information contact:  
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# H ygiene H ypothesis

**Gordon Maupin**  
**Executive Director**  
**The Wilderness Center**

## Extinction of experience

is the result of a mega trend in society separating children from nature. This separation may have another consequence: health problems related to the immune system.

Sometimes seemingly unrelated information comes together in a synthesis which puts issues in a new light or broader perspective. My concerns about the extinction of experience converge with what immunologists call “the hygiene hypothesis.” The synthesis is the notion that it is healthy for children to play outdoors.

I just love to call this a “truly radical” notion. Many trends in modern society create barriers between children and the outdoors. That outdoor play could be considered a radical notion epitomizes crazy aspects of modern culture. Virtually no one disagrees with the concept of outdoor play. People intuitively know that exercise, fresh air and sunshine are healthy. Yet fear, combined with glitzy home entertainment and urbanization, seems almost to lock children indoors.

So, how does the “hygiene hypothesis” fit? What is it anyway?

In basic terms, the hygiene hypothesis states that, to develop properly, the immune system must be challenged by a wide array of organisms in early childhood. If it is not challenged early in life, the individual could develop immune system problems like asthma, allergies, and autoimmune diseases.



*Encourage the natural need to explore.*

The evidence for the hygiene hypothesis is compelling and immunologists take it most seriously. Over the last several years, research on the hygiene hypothesis has been increasing and branching into ever-widening investigations.

**The hygiene hypothesis** was first proposed by epidemiologist, E.P. Strachen in 1989. In the *British Medical Journal*, he linked the rise in allergy cases to declining family sizes and reduced exposure to germs. He thought an under stimulated immune systems might be reacting to harmless substances. (Goldstein 2004)

The initial evidence was epidemiological. In western developed countries, disorders of the immune system have undergone rapid, unexplained increases. In poor, undeveloped countries, this has not happened. “In the United States alone, from 1980 to 1994 the prevalence of asthma increased by 75%”. (Wills-Karp 2001)

More epidemiological studies looking at exposure to germs and immunological disorders have uncovered compelling relationships.

- Children who grow up on farms with livestock are less susceptible to asthma, allergies, and other autoimmune diseases.
- Prior to German unification, East Germany had low standards of public health and relatively low levels of immune system diseases. Following unification and subsequently improved standards of hygiene, immunological diseases increased to levels similar to West Germany.
- Early childhood infections appear to provide a level of protection against autoimmune diseases.
- Children with older siblings have fewer autoimmune diseases.
- Children with a pet in the home have fewer autoimmune diseases.
- Early age day-care attendance appears to reduce prevalence of allergic diseases.
- Infants experiencing fevers before the first birthday are less likely to develop allergies by ages six to seven.
- A study of Italian military recruits revealed that those exposed to Hepatitis A (presumed to be indicative of exposure to fecal-oral pathogens) exhibited fewer atopic reactions and exhibited lower levels of respiratory

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# Resurrection (Continued from page 1)

times. Slowly, his story unraveled. A chauffer, killing time before picking up his next client at the airport, he lived in Trenton, NJ. As I had lived in Trenton for a couple years, we talked about “our” neighborhoods. He related how as a boy he and his buddies had explored Duck Island and the Trenton Marsh (a 1,500 acre open area that was my territory for the NJ Breeding Bird atlas years ago). His was “always outside.”

That night I read Ken and Gordon’s thoughts and began to wonder why this man never became a naturalist. This led me to wonder why so many people “get back to nature” on ski slopes, fishing ponds, motorcycles, or Jet Skis. Are they not still looking for that “frequent, unsupervised, outdoor experience?” Where is the difference?

For me, and I would be willing to bet each and every one of us, there was a role model, a mentor. As a child, my family taught respect for nature, but did little to inspire the naturalist in me. That didn’t happen until college and one professor made the difference. His enthusiasm for learning and sharing, his breadth of knowledge, his willingness to spend time with us and to lead us to new experiences, set my path.

**Could it be that we are also missing** that one-on-one time so critical to a child, young teen or young adult, which pulls that “frequent, unsupervised, outdoor experience” into focus and gives it purpose. I know I am too busy to spend time with kids anymore. Just the day prior, staff and I were talking about how this one young man was “hanging out” and how the staff was feeling like babysitters. He is taking up valuable time they need to generate the money to pay for their position. Three days later I retracted

my answer.

Reflecting upon 29 years in the field it is evident that my “success stories” needed an inordinate amount of my time. Interestingly, it has been maybe 15 years since I had a “success story,” which corresponds nicely with when we ended our teen outdoor adventure program and when we moved towards a more business model of operation. They took too much of our precious time and didn’t pay the bills!

Did the chauffer ever have a role model to lead him out of the wilderness of childhood into an environmentally focused world? Have we spent too much time working with groups of fourth graders because we have learned that most people are first exposed to their life interests by the time they are eleven? Have we spent too little time with that teenager who is hanging around our center getting into trouble? Have we neglected this audience because they are too difficult or dangerous? Is generation X missing because there was nowhere for them to play or because we neglected to provide a mentor?

**I do not dispute the premise** provided by Ken or Gordon that we need to facilitate unsupervised natural experiences. But, our failure may be far deeper. I

am not so convinced that the vast majority of our children couldn’t find their pocket wilderness. Working in a relatively urban setting, there are numerous little “lawless” places – greenbelts, pocket parks, vacant lots, etc.



*Build a firm foundation of sharing.*

Unfortunately, as pointed out by Ken and Gordon, these places can be dangerous as a child may get mildly or severely injured. The mantra “to protect the children” has reached the ludicrous solution of a sterilized world. It has created a world where a child cannot collect pond critters without wearing rubber gloves or finishing up with Purell. It is now a

world of virtual reality (look at this model of how a marsh works—see the mud made of chocolate pollute the water). To me the environmentalist message that the world is unclean or in trouble and people are the problem is as mentally damaging as the message of my youth — we were all going to die from the A-Bomb.

In my mind, the more important questions are. How do we resurrect the inner child that not only accepts, but also relishes the idea of getting dirty? How do we mentor the parents of our youth so they will not punish their child for visiting Ken’s backyard mud pit? How do we compete with the fast paced world that says the natural experience needs to be motorized or sanitized (think eco-adventure resorts)? How do we tap

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# Hygiene (Continued from page 3)

allergies.

- Children treated with antibiotics during the first two years of life are more prone to developing allergic disease.
- There is an inverse relationship between infection with helminthes (parasitic worms) and immunological disease. (The more worms you have, the fewer immunological disorders you develop.)

## There are dozens of studies

along these lines implicating a host of different disease processes. The common thread is that exposure to a wide variety of microbes seems to protect against disorders of the immune system. If you wish to read more, a quick Internet search under “hygiene hypothesis” will keep you busy for hours.

There is a certain beauty to the hygiene hypothesis. As a field biologist, I love the famous quote by Theodosius Dobzhansky, “Nothing in biology makes sense except in the light of evolution.” This hypothesis fits evolutionary theory like a glove.

However, the road to hell is paved with scientists who fell in love with a pet hypothesis. Internet research isn’t going to do the trick. I didn’t want to promote “crackpot science,” so I determined to meet with some people who could give a better feel for what this all might mean. My board president, a physician, arranged a lunch with two of his colleagues, a respiratory specialist and an infectious disease specialist.

The physicians, too, found the evolutionary perspective of the hygiene hypothesis compelling. Their experience pointed to a case where modern medicine went astray by not considering evolutionary theory —

breast feeding. Today, most practitioners strongly encourage breast-feeding of infants, but that was not always the case. In developed countries, bottle-feeding was the norm 50 years ago. Bottle-feeding was modern and scientific; breast feeding was primitive. Eventually, however, evidence of better health among breast-fed children piled up to overturn bottle feeding recommendations. Hindsight shows how medicine stepped away from evolutionary theory and made a mistake. People evolved to be breast



*Get “in touch” with nature.*

fed. Indeed breast feeding is as old as mammals. It works. Natural selection cares nothing for what people think. It impartially selects for success.

The infectious disease specialist laid it out for me. Mothers transfer antibodies to babies through breast milk. This confers some level of protection from pathogens to an immature immune system. Once again, it makes evolutionary sense. Babies are weaned as the immune system develops. Simultaneously, they become more mobile and able to explore the environment. Any parent knows babies explore by putting things in their mouth. As the mother’s

antibodies decline, the baby’s immune system develops and is challenged by a myriad of microbes. Children eat dirt, or at the very least ingest dirt unintentionally. (Calahan 2003) Babies get dirt all over their skin. This exposure to dirt, either oral or topical, challenges the immune system with untold (and unknown) species of microbes. A gram of fertile agricultural soil may contain 2.5 billion bacteria, 400,000 fungi, 50,000 algae and 30,000 protozoa. (Quebec Biodiversity Website) Bacteriologists analyzing the DNA in soil samples estimate 4,000 to 5,000 species of bacteria in a gram of soil. (Wilson 1992)

Our upbringing in a germ-aware world compels us to yank the dirty toy away from the child and to scrub the child with antibacterial soap every night. We’re completely dismayed if we see a child eat dirt. But, people were living on planet earth long before Louis Pasteur developed the germ theory of disease. According to the hygiene hypothesis, this exposure to germs is necessary for the healthy development of a normal immune system. Just as laboratory animals suffer immune disorders from being reared in sterile environments, people may suffer from failure to encounter enough germs at an early age.

## No one in their right mind

would recommend that western democracies abandon the hard-won gains in public health. Basic measures of public health have, without doubt, prevented millions of deaths. Clean, safe water is a must. Treating infections with antibiotics is necessary. However, an obsession with creating a germ-free home is a potentially counter productive Faustian deal to trade one set of diseases for another. Separating children from good, healthy outdoor

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# Hygiene (Continued from page 5)

dirt could be harmful to their health.

If you accept the hygiene hypothesis, outdoor play is essential for creating a healthy child. Outdoor play is the key to combating the extinction of experience. Eating dirt, rolling the mud, scraping knees on the ground, getting greased by bug juice, and generally getting dirty during outdoor play may be essential to complete health. A healthy body requires a healthy immune system. The immune system must be challenged in young children in order to develop properly.

As environmentalists concerned about creating the next generation of environmentalists, we need to combat the extinction of experience. One arrow in our intellectual quiver is the hygiene hypothesis. We need to begin a national dialogue encouraging parents to let their children play outdoors, get dirty, climb trees, catch crayfish, and bond with nature. It is good for their health. What a truly radical notion!

## Selected References

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## Resurrection

(Continued from page 4)

into that rebellious teen to focus their energy on a viable future? How do we convince youth that there is a viable future if they have been told they must "save the earth"? If the Earth is in trouble, why NOT live life for today? Maybe our message of doom and sacrifice doesn't resonate because anyone can see; no individual person's sacrifice will make a shred of difference.

What are the answers? We need to start with remembering our mentors and what they did to inspired us. How did they move us from the frequent, unsupervised, nature experience to the frequent, focused, "I can do my part to improve the world" experience? What are we doing to resurrect the spirit infused by the unsupervised, nature experience that was lost by the aging child? A question frequently discussed at ANCA meetings is "What activities attract people to your center?" Should the real question be: "What activities at your center are turning that teen, genXer, or baby boomer into an activist?" Are we afraid to encourage activism because a funder may be insulted? Lets talk!

## Position Openings

### Executive Director

Lake Katherine Nature Preserve  
Palos Heights, IL

Compensation  
\$45,000 - \$60,000

#### Contact

Dan Nisavic  
City Administrator  
7607 West College Drive  
Palos Heights, IL 60463  
(708) 361-1800  
[dan@palosheights.org](mailto:dan@palosheights.org)

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### Development Vice President

Kalamazoo Nature Center  
Kalamazoo, MI

Send letter, salary requirement, resume, and three references to:

Development Position  
Kalamazoo Nature Center  
7000 N. Westnedge Ave.  
Kalamazoo, MI 49009

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### Maintenance/Stewardship Coordinator

Kalamazoo Nature Center  
Kalamazoo, MI

Send letter, salary requirement, resume, and three references to:

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Position  
Kalamazoo Nature Center  
7000 N. Westnedge Ave.  
Kalamazoo, MI 49009

# Membership Update

**Bo Glover**  
**Chairperson**  
**Membership Committee**

The benefits received from membership in ANCA are far more valuable than the annual cost. ANCA has a long tradition of providing service to our members through:

- *Directions*, our quarterly newsletter with annual special editions such as the recent Extinction of Experience and salary survey
- The annual Summit
- Our website, [www.natctr.org](http://www.natctr.org), and its Members' Only resources
- AListserv with hundreds of participants willing to help you sort through specific issues
- ANCA's Peer Review teams, providing assistance to your organization on a wide range of issues and topics by professionals in the field
- The *Director's Guide to Best Practices* handbook and future monographs
- A multitude of networking opportunities

Membership in ANCA provides you these benefits and much, much more. A bargain at any price.

Increasing costs have affected us all, so, for the first time in ANCA's 11 year history we are increasing our membership dues. The new dues structure is \$70 for an annual Individual Membership and \$110 for an annual Institutional Membership. Institutional Membership is for organizations that wish to designate two senior staff members.

The increase means that membership in ANCA is still a bargain and on top of that we are offering you an even better deal. Renew for 2005 prior to January 1 and you pay the old membership fee of \$60 for Individual and \$90 for Institutional. This is our thanks for your continued support to the nature center profession.

If you have any questions, or concerns, about the price increase please call me at (494) 645-8489 (email: [BoGlo@aol.com](mailto:BoGlo@aol.com)).



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## Director's Guide to Best Practices

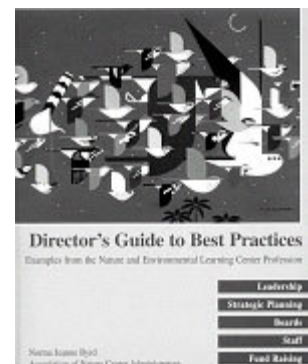
The Director's Guide includes chapters on five essential areas: leadership, strategic planning, boards, staff, and fund raising.

ANCA developed this book for busy directors and staff people with many roles and responsibilities. It is a handbook for those new to the profession and will also challenge and inspire the most experienced directors and their staffs. ANCA members have also found it valuable to give to board members, and volunteers. Directors from 23 states and 40 different facilities reviewed and commented on the chapter drafts and evaluated the book's effectiveness.

**Order Your Copy Today!**

Price of the book is \$60.00 plus \$5.00 shipping and handling.

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## RESIDENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING CENTER DIRECTOR'S CONFERENCE

January 27 - 30, 2005  
Kanuga Conferences  
Hendersonville, NC

This conference is a great opportunity to share information and discuss issues and trends related to running residential programs and facilities.

Thursday will be a travel day with check-in, introductions, and conference logistics. Friday and Saturday sessions are built on the "Open Space" concept. The conference group as a whole will create the agenda by identifying topics that are important to the individual regarding residential environmental education. A schedule is then created and participants attend sessions most applicable to their interests and concerns. Sunday we will wrap up the conference, plan for the next, and travel home.

There will be free time set aside in the afternoons for participants to relax and explore. This area of the Southern Appalachians includes many significant natural history areas and is especially noted for waterfalls.

Evenings will be a chance to come together on a more social note to conclude the day's events. Plan to participate and lead evening activities such as stories, song, initiatives, star gazing, other programs you would like to share, or relax by the fireside with friends.

Multiple, double and single occupancy will be available. Blankets, pillows, linens, and towels are provided. Supper Thursday through breakfast Sunday is provided (breakfast is a buffet; lunch and supper are family style). For more information on Kanuga go to their website [www.kanuga.org](http://www.kanuga.org).

For more information, including a registration form, go to [www.natctr.org/news.html](http://www.natctr.org/news.html), or, contact Paul Bockoven at (828) 692-9136 (email [paulb@kanuga.org](mailto:paulb@kanuga.org)).

## Annual Appeal Contributions

Thanks to the following members for supporting  
the day-to-day work of ANCA

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## Monograph Fund Contributions

Thanks to the following members for supporting  
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# ANCA Technical Consults: YOUR FRIEND IN THE BUSINESS!

## ANCA offers consulting assistance

to nature centers and other environmental education organizations at very reasonable fees. The charge includes the cost of transportation, lodging and meals for the team, plus a \$2,750 fee that goes toward supporting ANCA's professional services and planning. Our Board of Directors, and members, provide these services with no personal financial gain, while you gain the advantage of advice and guidance from some of the profession's most respected and experienced leaders.

What can be covered? Well, just about anything involved with planning, funding, and operations. Some topics include:

- Assistance with long range and strategic planning
- Review education programs, exhibits, or trails
- Mission focus
- Fundraising and fiscal management
- Facility planning
- Starting a center
- Management strategies and use planning

## To find out more about

ANCA's Peer Consults, contact any ANCA board member or Wayne Clark at  
817-237-6940  
Wayne.Clark@fortworthgov.org.

Jeff Brown from the Yellowstone Association had this to say about ANCA consults:

**"We contacted the folks at ANCA and they pulled together some of the best people in this business on very short notice. The consulting team spent two full days in the park and provided a detailed written report within one month. The process was fun, the cost was reasonable, and the results are tangible - we are moving forward with a revised proposal based on the excellent advice we received from these experts."**

# ANCA Membership Form

## Please Join Us!

If you would like to become a member of ANCA, fill out this form and mail to the ANCA office (address below).  
Members benefits - 4 Quarterly Issues of Directions • Special Publications • Invitation to ANCA Summits and Workshops

Institutional Memberships allow for two staff members to receive benefits. Questions? Call 1-800-490-2622.

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Please check the desired membership level: \_\_\_ \$60\* Individual or \_\_\_ \$90\* Institutional  
(\* This membership rate is valid until 12/31/04 )

Make checks payable to ANCA and mail with this form to:

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# Calling all Authors!

Your literary contributions are needed for **Directions**.

■ **Profiles:** Highlights people who put their efforts toward improving the profession. Send a paragraph or two about their background and accomplishments and a picture.

■ **From the Field:** Features news, notes, and natural history from your nature center or beyond.

■ **Articles:** The best articles come from you - the members. Articles need to be 1-2 pages (500 - 1,200 words). Technical language can be used as needed, but, remember your audience may not have your level of expertise in the subject. Fun, light-hearted, and inspirational articles are always welcome as well.

Submit your articles to:

ANCA  
1000 Aullwood Rd.  
Dayton, OH 45414  
lbrown@audubon.org

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