

directions

Journal of the Association of Nature Center Administrators

20 Years Old & Going Strong

ANCA celebrates its creation & successes

Jen Levy
Executive Director
Association of Nature Center
Administrators
Logan, UT

It is with great pleasure and honor that we bring you this Special Issue of *Directions*, telling the story of ANCA's beginnings. I want to thank the ANCA founders for their stories and assistance in putting this issue together. Also, thanks to everyone who dug through their attics, dusted off old ANCA documents, and took the time to capture their memories for this publication.

ANCA was established to fill a niche that was not being filled by any other professional organization – to serve professionals who run nature and environmental learning centers. The initial steering committee was asked to contribute financially, to serve on the board, to

name the organization, and to participate in the first peer consults. In doing so, they established not only a professional organization devoted to the needs of administrators, but the




ANCA's founders and members from the early days pictured here at Indian Creek Nature Center in Cedar Rapids, IA, at ANCA's first official member workshop in October, 1990.

ANCA culture of dedication to mission, networking, and friendship that still exists today.

In writing his memories of the

early years, Loren Lustig, who served on the ANCA steering committee, recalls a conversation he had with Mike Link about how the measure of commitment can be validated by a lifestyle. He writes, "When a person develops a passion for nature, conservation, and outdoor recreation, it becomes apparent and documentable in their entire lifestyle, including all that which is done beyond the scope of the nature center. All of life becomes a funnel that provides enhanced wisdom, understanding, and insight into all that relates to our passion."

Members of the steering committee had a commitment not only to nature but also to the mission of nature centers everywhere. For all of us who have benefitted from the many services ANCA has provided for the past 20 years, I am grateful for their hard work, perseverance, and lifetime of commitment. I look forward to the next 20 years! 

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Founded in 1989, the Association of Nature Center Administrators is a private non-profit organization dedicated to promoting and supporting best leadership and management practices for nature and environmental learning centers.

Serving nearly 500 organizations, ANCA is the leader in the profession.



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Directions is a quarterly publication of the Association of Nature Center Administrators, distributed to members of ANCA as a membership benefit.

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How it all Started...

Tracy Kay
Executive Director
Westchester Children's Museum
White Plains, NY

On the 20th anniversary of the formation of ANCA, I've been asked to describe just how it was that ANCA came into being. It would take several volumes to tell the entire story, complete with footnotes explaining the relationship of Beer Nuts to the name of the organization, the importance of roommate assignments to a good night's rest, and wild tales of airline experiences getting steering committee members to the first few meetings. The following summary of events was compiled from my personal notes and files I saved from ANCA's formative years:

Former ANCA president Gordon Maupin, executive director at The Wilderness Center in Wilmot, OH, noted in one of his past columns in *Directions* that, before the formation of ANCA, many nature center directors operated in a vacuum with little opportunity to network with their peers. In the late 1970s, I was one of those directors.

As a rookie administrator, I had found a local network of nature centers in the Westchester, NY, and Fairfield, CT, area, but I was searching for something on a broader scale. Going through documents at the Rye Nature Center, I thought I had found the answer when I uncovered a report by the National Audubon Society Nature Center Division. Upon contacting Audubon, I learned that they had disbanded their Nature Center Division.

Another document in the Rye files referred to the Natural Science for Youth Foundation (NSYF - see "Before ANCA" on page 6) as an organization created to help communities

establish nature centers. I began attending their annual conferences and registered for a special workshop for nature center administrators. Unfortunately, the workshop was cancelled when NSYF closed its Pennsylvania headquarters and moved to reorganize in Georgia.

Not one to give up, my search for a professional network continued through attendance at the alphabet soup of annual association conferences: AAM, NAI, AEE, NAAEE, NSTA, NYSOEA, PAEE. The conferences were great but none was

focused specifically on the professional needs of the nature center administrator.

In November 1986, I attended the National Symposium on Urban Wildlife hosted by the National Institute for Urban Wildlife (NIUW) in Chevy Chase, MD. I was there not so much related to duties as a nature center administrator, but as Rye's City naturalist, seeking solutions to problems

In January 1989 the Association of Nature Center Administrators was formed with the following goals:

1. To establish a national network for nature center administrators;
2. To promote the identity and credibility of nature centers as an educational function; and
3. To provide nature center administrators with products and services to improve their performance on the job.

associated with growing geese and deer populations, the spread of raccoon rabies, etc. Following one of the sessions, I happened to have lunch at a table that included Gomer Jones, NIUW's president. The discussion turned to NIUW's Urban Wildlife Sanctuary Program and the role of nature centers in educating the public about urban/suburban wildlife issues. Gomer previously had served as a Vice President for the National Audubon Society and the National Wildlife Federation, noting that, during his tenure with those organizations, he had visited many community nature centers and discovered that other administrators also were searching for a network of peers to discuss the challenges and opportunities facing the profession.

The lunch table discussion led to an invitation to me to join the NIUW Board of Directors. At the time, Jack

Young, a Senior Vice President at Edison Electric Institute (EEI), was serving as NIUW's Board Chair. EEI had experience establishing professional networks and was searching for ways to demonstrate their concern about the environment, show an interest in nature, and communicate honest efforts to improve the way their industry interacted with the natural world.

In keeping with that record, EEI underwrote an effort by NIUW to explore the need for a professional network for nature center administrators.

Working with Gomer, Jack, and Alex Wilson, EEI's liaison to the project, I established a steering committee of 12 nature center directors and convened a meeting to discuss the desire, merits, and feasibility of creating a national network for nature center administrators. The Steering Committee included Rich Horton from Shaker Lakes Nature Center in Ohio, Bill Kolodnicki from Theodore Roosevelt Sanctuary on Long Island, Loren Lustig from the Hashawa Environmental Education Center in Maryland, Tim Merriman from the Pueblo Greenway and Nature Center in Colorado, Ron Osterbauer from Riverbend Nature Center in Minnesota, Rich Patterson from Indian Creek Nature Center in Iowa, and Bob Thomas from the Louisiana Nature & Science Center in the Big Easy.

Rich Horton, Tim Merriman, Ron Osterbauer, and Bob Thomas were invited, in part, because of their involvement and participation in NAI and NSYF conferences and activities. Loren Lustig came to the committee at the suggestion of Lowell Adams, NIUW's Vice President, and Rich Patterson at the suggestion of Gomer Jones. Bill Kolodnicki came to the group through his involvement in the New York State Outdoor Education Association and represented a tie to the National Audubon Society, at the time headed by Peter Berle.

Since the initial meeting was to take place in Rye, NY, the effort took advantage of the talent and professional experience of members from the informal nature center network existing at the time in the NY/CT area. Rounding out the steering committee members were Steve Coleman from Teatown Lake Reserva-

tion, Bill Lawyer from Greenburgh Nature Center, Barry Samuel from Westchester County Parks' Nature Center Division, and me from the host Rye Nature Center. At the time, the group collectively represented over 150 years of experience in the nature center profession.

The first meeting generated enough interest and commitment to the effort that EEI supported a series of additional steering committee meetings. Those meetings resulted in the development of a formal market study aimed at defining the interests and needs of nature center administrators. The members of the steering committee demonstrated their personal commitment to the cause by pooling their own resources to finance a survey distributed at random to over 800 nature center administrators.

The group contracted with Lisa Brochu, ANCA's first (acting) executive director, to prepare the survey, conduct follow-up interviews with respondents, and prepare a summary of the survey results. The response to the survey was significant, representing 40 states. Seventy-three percent of the respondents expressed a strong interest in participating in a national organization focused primarily on the needs of nature center administrators.

Based on these results, the steering committee met in January 1989 and voted unanimously to form the Association of Nature Center Administrators with the following goals:

1. To establish a national network for nature center administrators;
2. To promote the identity and credibility of nature centers as an educational function; and
3. To provide nature center administrators with products and services to improve their performance on the job.

Each steering committee member demonstrated their continued support for the formation of the new association by pledging a \$150 founding membership. At its earliest meetings, the committee also discussed the need to identify a "next generation" of leaders to ensure the success of the organization and the profession. To that end, by-laws established term limits for ANCA board members and the ANCA board continued to recruit new leaders.

(continued on page 5)



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ANCA's Early Days: Memories of the Founding

Rich Patterson
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Cedar Creek, IA

During the 1980s the Indian Creek Nature Center sponsored well attended natural landscaping workshops. Many attendees created backyard wildlife habitats. The local weed commissioner was hassling some of them, and I began searching for an organization that would recognize backyard habitats as a good thing.

I learned of the National Institute for Urban Wildlife's (NIUW) backyard sanctuary program. After calling for details I was connected with Gomer Jones, NIUW's president. He was trying to market the sanctuary program and felt that nature centers would be natural partners but was concerned that no professional organization existed to enable efficient communication.

Gomer had been in touch earlier with Tracy Kay, then-director of the Rye Nature Center in New York and also with other directors. Recognizing a networking opportunity he contacted a long time friend, Dick Thorrell, at the Edison Electric Institute. The Institute provided a grant to bring together scattered nature center directors. Gomer asked if I'd travel to New York to meet. When I told him my travel budget was slim he replied, "No problem, we have a grant to cover your expenses."

Our group met several times in 1988 and 1989. Most meetings were at the Rye Nature Center but we met once at Teatown Lake Reservation. The initial goal wasn't to create a professional organization. It was simply to network.

This was a delightful opportunity for me, as I was director of the only private nonprofit nature center in Iowa. I had no local peers to interact with, and the trips to New York gave

me an opportunity to share successes and frustrations with others sailing in similar professional boats.

The desire to create a professional organization that would help nature center leaders improve their administrative ability came during those meetings in New York. We struggled with a name (see "Beer Nuts" on page 5) but eventually decided upon the Association of Nature Center Administrators – ANCA.

ANCA formed during our last meeting, and we drew straws to see who would be on the new board. I drew the shortest straw and was only

The local convention bureau sponsored a trip out, and Gomer inspected hotels and other area attractions. The symposium was held in Iowa.

Many ANCA members attended and an array of sessions was held at the Indian Creek Nature Center. This was ANCA's first official member workshop.

Of the ANCA founders I believe I am the only one still in the same job. However, several remain active in the field.

Gomer Jones played a critical founding function by locating grant money to bring us together. After a




photo by Charity Krueger

ANCA was founded by a dedicated group of professionals looking for ways to network, improve their administrative abilities, and trade war stories and successes. Second-generation leaders (like those in this photo from Summit II held at Aullwood Audubon Center and Farm in 1996) continued and institutionalized many traditions which are still carried on today.

active about a year. Others served longer and were critical to the growth of ANCA. A second-generation of nature center leaders soon became involved and quickly carried the torch. These second- and third-generation ANCA board members made the organization bloom.

During one of my conversations with Gomer I learned that he wanted to hold the National Institute for Urban Wildlife's next symposium in the Midwest. I asked if he'd consider Cedar Rapids, and he said, "Sure."

long career with the Boy Scouts of America, the National Audubon Society, the National Wildlife Federation, and the National Institute for Urban Wildlife he is now retired and living in Pennsylvania. 

Rich Patterson has been Director of the Indian Creek Nature Center in Cedar Rapids, IA, since 1978. He is a founder of ANCA and received ANCA's 2007 Nature Center Leadership Award.

Beer Nuts: a Vital(?) Aspect of ANCA's History

Bob Thomas
Director
Center for Environmental Communication, Loyola University,
New Orleans, LA

First printed in *Directions*, October -
December 2004

Many of our members have heard, at one time or another, that Beer Nuts (those sweet, tasty morsels – especially in a can) played a pivotal role in ANCA's early development. Few are privy to just how important that name may have been had sanity not prevailed during a meeting long ago.

It goes back to the beginning of time in the organization's evolution. After deciding that there would indeed be a new organization to serve the needs of nature center administrators, a list of tasks was generated.

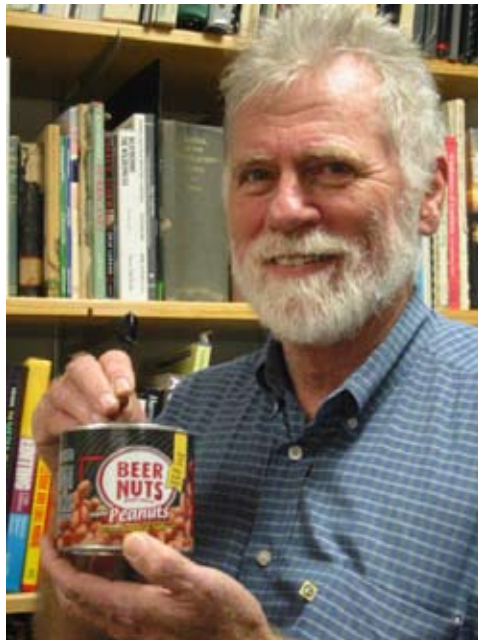
First on the list was to choose a name. Simple, right? The team actually labored for several hours before arriving at a working name – the one that survived and we use today – the Association of Nature Center Administrators (ANCA). The charge was to find a name that identified the organization as one that serves the needs of those of us who manage the daily operations, and long-term planning, of nature centers. All agreed that the name should provide an easily pronounced acronym for ease in communication.

There were many great ideas, but only two received serious consideration by the early organizers – ANCA and Beer Nuts. BEER NUTS, you ask?

We sat in a circle in a dimly lit room. All were pensive, digging through the far reaches of their minds searching for the perfect name. Out of the blue, Tim Merriman, now the esteemed Executive Director of the National Association for Interpretation (and then the highly regarded [see, I can resist temptation, Tim] director of the Pueblo Nature Center), said, "Brotherhood of Effete Educative Ranks of Non-aligned Usufructory Treesaps." All heads jerked in his direction and unanimous voices said, "What does that have to do with

our work?" Tim said, "Well, I just thought it would be a good idea to have the acronym Beer Nuts." We all guffawed, appreciating his usual odd sense of humor, and someone asked, "How and why on Earth did you come up with that name?"

In typical Timian response, he said, "Well, nosy board members are always asking, 'Now, tell me again where you are going?' I would just love to say, 'I'm going to a Beer Nuts meeting.'" We all politely chuckled, and we quickly changed the subject (as we often did with Tim's quirky suggestions) and resumed our deliberations.



Bob Thomas, one of ANCA's founders, still enjoys snacking on Beer Nuts just like in the early days of ANCA.

It may have ended there, but nooooo! In 1990, the Environmental Protection Agency opened its Office of Environmental Education with a lot of pomp and circumstance. Several ANCA board members were invited to participate and we were offered a display table. The day of the event, several of us ran down the street to get some candy for our table. As we milled around the store, one of us yelled, "Hey, how about having a bowl of Beer Nuts?" We enthusiastically agreed; paid a king's ransom for a can of the precious nibbles, and the tradition began.

Since that time, Beer Nuts have

been consistently included in the lore of ANCA - even though many have never heard this interesting (sorta) story. 🌿

Bob Thomas was the founding director of the Louisiana Nature Center from 1978-1994. He served on the ANCA steering committee, then on the board from 1987-1995, as president from 1991-92, and on the American Association of Museums' Accreditation Commission from 1991-1996. He received the Elsie M. B. Naumberg Award in 1983, Margaret Douglas Medal in Conservation Education in 1994, and ANCA's 2001 Nature Center Leadership Award. Bob now holds the Loyola Chair in Environmental Communication at Loyola University New Orleans and continues his work in environmental education.

Bob also has his own account at beernuts.com. Do you?

Started (continued from page 3)

The road to formation was occasionally rough, and many individuals deserve credit for getting ANCA to where it is today. For those involved in the formation of ANCA, it has been extremely gratifying to witness its growth and success and the changing faces of its leaders. Our collective thanks to all who have been, are, and will be involved in the Association of Nature Center Administrators! 🌿

Tracy Kay has been in the nature center/museum field for 32 years serving as director of the Rye Nature Center in New York & the Schuylkill Center for Environmental Education in Philadelphia, as Deputy Commissioner for The Nassau County Museum Division on Long Island, and currently as the Executive Director of the Westchester Children's Museum in New York. He also serves as Field Reviewer for the American Association of Museums and the Institute of Museum and Library Services. An ANCA founding member, Tracy served as the organization's first president and was the recipient of ANCA's 2005 Leadership Award.

Before ANCA

Dick Touvell
Executive Director
Chippewa Nature Center
Midland, MI

The acronyms NSYF and JRF are perhaps not familiar to some currently-practicing professionals in the nature and environmental education field. However, for many the mention of Natural Science for Youth Foundation (NSYF) and its founder, Dr. John Ripley Forbes (JRF), stir fond and nostalgic memories. After all, John Ripley Forbes was one of the primary leaders of the nature center movement through his work with NSYF for 25 years.

Some describe Dr. Forbes (1913-2006) as the “Johnny Appleseed” of nature centers, as he traveled extensively around the country inspiring people to establish community nature centers. In fact, he was the catalyst for the creation of more than 200 nature and science centers with his passion for environmental education! This in itself is truly an extraordinary legacy.

Dr. Forbes’ work spanned 45 years, for NSYF did not appear from a void when it was first incorporated in 1961. Dr. Forbes was only taking the next step in the evolution of an organization which began in 1944 as the William T. Hornaday Foundation, then became the National Foundation for Junior Museums in 1953, then the Nature Centers for Young America in 1958 and, finally in 1961, the NSYF. John Ripley Forbes shepherded this extraordinary growth as no one else could and NSYF’s tagline, “Open Wide to Youth All Gateways to Nature,” well describes his life’s work.

In addition to spawning nature centers, Forbes convened 25 years of NSYF conferences that brought professionals together from across

the country. Written proceedings of each conference were found on the bookshelves of many of us as young professionals.

I became involved initially in 1983 as a participant in NSYF’s conference in Venice, FL. Most fortunately for me as an NSYF employee, I, along with Owen Winters, subsequently coordinated NSYF conferences in Milford, PA (1985), New Orleans (1987), and San Francisco (1989).

Many remember NSYF’s periodic publications such as the *Opportunities* job bulletin, distributed bi-monthly to



Dr. John Ripley Forbes (1913-2006) inspired the creation of more than 200 nature and science centers throughout the country in his 45-year career in the field.

our profession for 17 years.

NSYF was also dedicated to monitoring the pulse on what was happening in the field, yielding the publication of a series of Blue Ribbon Reports, including “The Status of the Natural Science Center Movement,” “Nature Centers’ Big Concerns,” and “Environmental Education Leaders Predict Future Trends.”

The most widely distributed publications were the 1984 and 1990 editions of *The Directory of Natural Science Centers*.

In discussing the years “before ANCA,” it’s especially noteworthy to mention that NSYF and the National Audubon Society (NAS) worked closely on many initiatives throughout the years to promote and develop centers and their staffs, including co-sponsoring many of the national conferences. Both NSYF and NAS were household words for professionals in the field.

So, what happened to NSYF and how did it evolve into ANCA? The simple answer is that it was time for new leadership to nurture the still-fragile nature and natural science education movement into maturity; the young leaders described in this ANCA 20th Anniversary Special Issue of *Directions* picked up the “heavy lifting” where John Ripley Forbes left off. His work paved the way for a new organization that would usher in a new business and management model, which we all now know as ANCA!

My time working alongside John Ripley Forbes, while only a short five years (1985-1990), is a constant reminder of how much impact one person can make. If you would like to learn more about John Ripley Forbes and the early years of our ever-evolving profession, grab a copy of a book (yet untitled) on this remarkable period by Montana-based writer Gary Ferguson, scheduled for release in late 2009. 🌿

Dick Touvell has been Executive Director at the Chippewa Nature Center since 1990. He joined the ANCA board in 2004 and is currently chair of the Nature Center Leadership Award and Summit Committees. In 2005 the Great Lakes/Great Summit was held at the Chippewa Nature Center.

The ANCA Culture

Bob Mercer
Director/Naturalist
Silver Lakes Nature Center
Bristol, PA

Every organization has a culture. Hopefully, you recognize and agree that ANCA's culture is one of openness and unrestrained sharing. This is not accidental.

From the beginning, the ANCA board was not elected, but members were requested to join to share their specific skills and talents. This could be perceived as the opposite of openness, but in the search for new board members, the nominating committee works very hard to make sure each board is a cross sample of our constituents. There is an effort to find balance in a myriad of characteristics including: gender, years of experience, size of organizations, types of organizations, and geographic location.

This balance of leaders within the profession bringing their knowledge and willingness to work hard and unselfishly has built an organization that represents all our members.

Early on the board recognized the value of frequent face-to-face meetings and searched for ways to engage more members. The ANCA Peer Consult program grew from this desire (see "The Beginning of Peer Consults" on page 12). The plan evolved so that consults built connections, involved multiple members as part of the consult team, and identified future board or committee members.

ANCA's annual Summit by design became the primary mechanism for peer interaction. The Summit schedule and events are specifically formatted to build connections. When planning the first Summits, (see "ANCA's 1st Summit" on page 9) the board decided the format must not exclusively depend upon "talking head" sessions where a person talks about their successful activity or personal skill. Instead, one day is set aside for detailed workshops on a topic of concern so members can hear from an expert, and the rest of the time is specifically geared towards the individual through facilitated sessions and open space topics. Ideas pour out from the collective brain and participants walk away with workable concepts they can integrate into their operation. A subset of the facilitated discussion, the Open Space sessions, allows each Summit participant to suggest a session topic and drive the conversation toward his or her specific needs.

There are plenty of "between meeting" networking opportunities to meet new people, share ideas and experi-



photo by Ken Voorhis

ANCA has strategically and deliberately developed a culture that encourages openness and unrestrained sharing like at this gathering at Islandwood on Bainbridge Island, WA.

ences, and tour the host facility.


The Summit Mentor Program brings together seasoned Summit participants with first-timers - another example of how ANCA strategically strives toward facilitating a strong peer network.

At ANCA board meetings, the conversation revolves around how to provide value to members. The following list provides examples of some of the services that have been developed in board discussions.

- The *Best Practices* books and monograph series offer members a mechanism to share their experiences for all to benefit from.
- The ANCA listserv is an immediate mechanism to pose a question and solicit ideas and support from one's peers.
- The "Member's Only" pages of ANCA's website offer a myriad of sample forms, policies, and guidelines as well as a plethora of archived *Directions* newsletters.
- The Salary Survey is a valuable tool to every member. As more ANCA members answer the survey questions, we gain better data for generating reports and trends in salaries and compensation.

As a long-serving board member, I know that ANCA has strategically and deliberately developed a culture that encourages open sharing. The desire for an active and engaged membership has moved and continues to move every decision forward.

This organization is your organization. Continue the tradition! Reach out to your peers, take the necessary time to feed the salary survey, answer some questions on the listserv, make sure you mingle during the Summit, and visit the "Members Only" pages of the website.

And never hesitate to let the ANCA staff or board know how this organization can help you do your job better. 

Bob Mercer served on the ANCA board from 1990 to 1997. In 2003 he re-joined the board to provide an old-timer's historical perspective. He has been involved with the development of the Director's Guide to Best Practices and all of ANCA's monographs. He helped establish the Salary Survey, is a co-auctioneer for the Summit auction, and has served on 18 Peer Consults - four of them as Team Leader.

ANCA Begins Its Endowment

Jim Berry
President
Roger Tory Peterson Institute
Jamestown, NY

August 16, 1997 marked the day the Association of Nature Center Administrators inaugurated its Endowment Fund.

It was the third annual Summit and was hosted jointly by the Jamestown Audubon Center and the Roger Tory Peterson Institute of Natural History (RTPI), both in Jamestown, NY. Jim Yaich and I were the respective executive directors (I am still on-board at RTPI, Yaich retired and was replaced by current executive director and past ANCA president, Ruth Lundin).

The setting was the Saturday evening dinner held at RTPI. Registrations for the Summit were capped at 90 to encourage the small working-group atmosphere that quickly became ANCA's *modus operandi* after the first and second Summits held in 1995 at Treehaven in Tomahawk, WI, and Aullwood Audubon Center and Farm in Dayton, OH.

Before dinner Dave Junkin, executive director of the Beaver Meadow Nature Center in North Java, NY, quietly approached ANCA president Corky McReynolds about his desire to encourage professional development among nature center executives by contributing \$10,000 to an endowment fund. Dave was deeply moved by the Summit experience of professionals like him coming together from across the country to share their knowledge, experience, and friendship.

Dave was already filling a need in the State of New York's nature center profession (and still is today with his wife Sandy) by vigorously networking the naturalists, directors, and board members together through meetings, workshops, mailings, and any other method he could think of. Now, with a national group fostering a professional nature center movement, he saw how the work he devoted his life to at his one nature



photo by Sandy Junkin

David Junkin, shown here holding a Junkin's warbler - a newly discovered hybrid species, started ANCA's endowment with a \$10,000 contribution in 1997 at ANCA's 3rd annual Summit in Jamestown, NY.


center could be magnified on a broad scale.

Corky shared Dave's extremely generous offer with fellow ANCA board member Ken Finch. Soon Ken saw an opportunity for Dave to have an even greater impact that night. As Dave relates the story of that night, "It was Ken and Corky who invented a matching challenge. They told me they were confident my 89 fellow directors present that night would come up with another \$10,000 once my gift was announced. The plan, as I recall it, was to wait until folks were finishing their meal in the awe-inspiring setting of RTPI.

"While Corky and Ken planned the strategy, the power failed and the Institute went completely dark. A lightning strike had killed the lights. Staff came up with enough candles to create a wonderful atmosphere inside the museum and the meal went on as normal." Soon Dave's gift was announced, creating lots of excitement and a standing ovation for him. The matching challenge kicked off and before the evening was done, another \$10,000 was pledged!

I spoke with Dave recently, and he said, "I'm so glad no one could see

me at my dimly lit table. I was as red-faced as I could be!"

Dave told me about a letter he still cherishes that was written by Corky. "Corky described the scene at the Peterson Institute as magical. Friends and colleagues enjoying an unplanned candle lit meal after a successful Summit and committing to the future of an upstart organization. Their organization." 

Jim Berry is a naturalist and nature center director who has spent the past 14 years as the president of the Roger Tory Peterson Institute of Natural History in Jamestown, NY. His first posting in the field was in 1972 as nature center manager at Hueston Woods State Park in Ohio. Jim's background includes wildlife rehabilitation and interpretive farm experience.

The ANCA Endowment

To date, \$115,098 has been donated and restricted for the use of the ANCA Endowment. ANCA maintains these assets for the purpose of fulfilling its central mission and they are divided among four funds with The Vanguard Group. The Endowment Fund balance as of June 30, 2008 was \$125,324.

The Richard Haley Memorial Scholarship Fund

Since the fund was established at the 2006 Summit, just over \$25,000 has been contributed to the Richard Haley Memorial Scholarship Fund. These assets are maintained with The Vanguard Group for the express intent of generating funds for ANCA Summit scholarships and ANCA Peer Consult scholarships.

ANCA's First Summit: How it all began

Corky McReynolds
Director
Treehaven Environmental Learning
Center
Tomahawk, WI

I was attending one of the ANCA board meetings in the winter of 1994 at Mike Link's beautiful Audubon Center of the North Woods. I remember Steve Niedecker from California trying to ski-jour down the ice-covered entrance road while the barefooted Mike Link watched in amusement and horror, wondering if he would ever see his dog or skis again. I don't recall that he was worried about Steve.

During the ANCA board meeting we were whining – I mean discussing – the desire to host some type of annual meeting. At every board meeting we would include the discussion of should we or should we not conduct a separate professional meeting. We had been occasionally hosting a day-long event in connection with National Institute for Urban Wildlife, National Association for Interpretation, and maybe others that I do not recall.

Every time we would get close to making a commitment we would run out of Beer Nuts, misplace our courage, and table the matter.

At that board meeting Ann Wilfarht, a Treehaven staff member doing some work for ANCA, was in attendance. Soon after this board meeting Ann brought into my office a brochure and a budget for hosting an annual meeting. She had realized that someone needed to step up to the plate and take a swing. She said to me, "We can do this!"

We passed along the information to the board and sort of indicated that

Treehaven was going to do this event. The board agreed, dispensed an appropriate amount of Beer Nuts and the first ANCA Summit was planned for and held at Treehaven in August, 1995.

The ANCA board wanted the Summit to be relevant and participatory for all those in attendance, so the concept of facilitated discussions was created. The concept is simple: we



The late Richard Haley (left) and then-ANCA President Ken Finch practiced complex personnel management skills at Summit II held at Aullwood Audubon Center and Farm.

wanted an open sharing opportunity rather than the traditional speaker presentation. We designed the Sunday field trip to be a day of rejuvenation, and those of us that participated enjoyed a wonderful canoeing experience in the nearby Sylvania Wilderness.

We had 25-30 in attendance and the feedback was very positive. Charity Krueger of Aullwood Audubon Center & Farm volunteered to take the next Summit for 1996 and the rest, as they say, is history.

For an evening activity I invited Loren Lustig to go fishing with me on the small lake I lived on. Loren is a fishing fanatic and a founder of ANCA in the very best sense of both terms. After the evening's Summit activities we arrived at Wildwood Lake at about 10:30pm on a warm, still night. We launched my small 12-foot


aluminum rowboat and soon found plenty of action with the largemouth bass.

Around midnight in the middle of the lake a sizable largemouth bass struck Loren's lure. Remember – Loren is a big man with a big heart and a big passion for angling. All of a sudden he jumps up in the boat, sets the hook with vigor while yelling out a whoop! I clutch my fishing gear

and hang on to the side of the rocking boat, certain we were headed into the cool dark water. Still dry and with the boat settled, I listened to Loren fight the bass while watching concerned neighbors' lights come on.

Moments later a very pleased Loren sat back down then released the bass back into the water. As the neighbors calmed, I watched the lights go out around the lake and then heard

Loren cast his lure to smack the dark water for the next bass.

Such a beginning for the ANCA Summit which has developed into another incredible legacy of service that helps define the core purpose and culture of ANCA. 

Corky McReynolds has 30 years of successful development and administration of two environmental learning centers. He has been director of Treehaven Environmental Learning Center since 1985. He was on ANCA's board of directors from 1990-1999, serving as president the last two years. He has been on 32 Peer Consults and acted as Team Leader on 25 of these (give or take a few). Corky received ANCA's 2004 Nature Center Leadership Award.

(See page 16 for a list of Summit hosts)

Residential Center Directors' Summit:

Developing fun & educational traditions

Ken Voorhis
Executive Director
Great Smoky Mountains Institute at
Tremont
Townsend, TN

Why would anyone want to work at, let alone direct, a program that runs 24 hours a day, seven days a week!?

The task is not only providing engaging programming but housing and feeding people while dealing with the associated needs and problems of those visitors who have come to live at your center for up to two weeks at a time.

I've been working at residential environmental learning centers since 1977, when I worked for a summer at the National Wildlife Federation's Wildlife Camp in Hendersonville, NC, and I have found incredible satisfaction and rewards in seeing the depth and impact that a residential experience can have on its participants.

Early in my career I tried to find an organization where I could share ideas with peers and be energized by like-minded colleagues. At numerous conferences I found pieces that related to what I was doing but not the whole. In ANCA, I found a group of people who really supported me as an administrator, even though the work I was doing wasn't that of a traditional nature center.

In 1994 we conducted a survey of other residential outdoor education and environmental learning centers to see what we had in common and to identify needs. The survey indicated a desire to organize a residential center directors' (RELCD) gathering, so we held the first meeting at Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont in January of 1996. No one wanted to start a new organization, so we asked

ANCA if they would be a sponsoring agency.

At that first meeting we decided that the value of the conference was in the experience base of the group, and so began a tradition of sharing ideas rather than scheduling pre-arranged sessions. We've adopted the "open space" system to conduct the



photo by Jen Martin

Recreation, site tours, and fun are integral parts of ANCA's bi-annual Residential Summits. Jen Martin, Ken Voorhis, Saul Weisberg, Tracie Johannessen, and Jeff Guisen enjoy the beauty of the Grand Tetons during the 2007 Regional Summit which was held at Teton Science Schools in Jackson Hole, WY.

entire Residential Summit.

On the first evening we bring the ideas of what we want to share and learn from one another and build the schedule for the rest of our time together. We typically have laptops at each session and produce notes from the various sessions that we then post. Proceedings and photos from the last two RELCD Summit can be found on ANCA's website - www.natctr.org.


While we've tried to keep these Summits flexible, a few traditions have developed that have served us well. Many of the centers involved have sent both directors and program directors to the Summit. We try to keep the focus on management-level topics, but have typically added a few more program-level discussions than at the annual ANCA Summit.

A most valuable component is that we meet at a residential center and always feature a behind-the-scenes tour of the facility and operation. A fun as well as educational tradition has been during the last evening when we share stories of some of the best and worst things that have happened at our centers. We've combined this

with a swap event. Everyone brings their center's t-shirts, water bottles, and other representative items and those items are placed on the floor in the middle of the circle of participants. To get an item one must tell a story. There are few times when I've laughed as hard or so felt the passion for the work that we do than during these sessions.

Each year a committee is selected that will help plan and settle on the location for the next Summit. It was decided long ago that meeting every other year was enough, and we've held to the original survey results which said that January or February was the best time for the meeting. Each Summit has been valuable and unique in its own way.

Below is where the RELCD Summits have been held so far:

- 1996 Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont, TN
- 1999 Treehaven Environmental Learning Center, WI
- 2001 Frost Valley YMCA, NY
- 2003 Bradford Woods, IN
- 2005 Mountain Trail Outdoor School, NC
- 2007 Teton Science Schools, WY
- 2009 Camp McDowell, AL 

Ken Voorhis has been involved with residential environmental learning centers for more than 30 years. For 25 of those he has been connecting people and nature in Great Smoky Mountains National Park as executive director of Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont.

ANCA's Nature Center Leadership Award:

Honoring our own

Pat Welch
Executive Director
Pine Jog Environmental Education
Center
West Palm Beach, FL

“and now, let’s enjoy hearing from this year’s recipient of ANCA’s Nature Center Leadership Award.” Since 2000, these words have signaled a sense of excitement and anticipation as another outstanding individual takes center stage during ANCA’s annual Summit. The recognition is the highest honor bestowed in this country upon an individual in the nature center profession.

The award’s purpose is to recognize individuals who have made a major contribution to the success of a nature center (or centers); made important contributions to their field through professional organizations; and supported and mentored other nature center leaders. Each year, the Summit audience is brought to their feet via standing ovation for the new recipient. Everyone is reminded again of just how much impact one individual can have.

In 2000, Dr. Lewis Batts, nationally-known ornithologist and pioneer in our field, was the first recipient of ANCA’s Nature Center Leadership Award. Dr. Batts was recognized for establishing three nature centers, had served as president of the National Audubon Society, and was a founding trustee of the Environmental Defense Fund. While the credentials of the nine award recipients to date are different, they all represent extraordinary contributions to the profession as represented by Dr. Batts.

The origin of the award is fascinating, rooted in good strategic planning and a chance serendipitous dinner conversation in September of 1999.

The ANCA strategic plan had identified as a priority the creation of an award that would recognize the professionalism and leadership of nature center administrators, but the plan had not determined how this award would be implemented.

As chance would have it, I was

making fundraising calls in Washington, DC, with my development coordinator, Lisa Peterfreund. Due to the fact that the 2000 ANCA Summit was being hosted by Mike Riska, executive director of the Delaware Nature Society, my trip included a visit with Mike to discuss some Summit details. (I was president of ANCA at the time.)

Lisa happens to be one of three trustees for a family foundation and over dinner was talking about an award her family foundation estab-



photo courtesy of Kalamazoo Nature Center

Dr. Lewis Batts, a pioneer in the nature center field, was the first recipient of ANCA’s prestigious Nature Center Leadership Award in 2000.

lished for an organization which had not been properly maintained. As Lisa expressed her disappointment over the lack of stewardship for the award, Mike and I had already taken a quantum leap to the logical remedy for both The Merrill G. and Emta E. Hasting Foundation and for ANCA.

Mike and I suggested that perhaps the foundation would be interested in applying the funding to an award that would recognize an outstanding nature center administrator. Lisa wanted to honor her father, Josh Peterfreund, and by December the foundation trustees approved \$4,000 to establish the award.

The award consisted of \$2,000 for a nature center selected by the awardee, \$1,000 given to the awardee, and \$1,000 for expenses and travel.

The first award was a magnificent porcelain creation by Helen Boehm entitled “New Generation Eagle.”

The Hastings Foundation funded three years of additional awards.

From the very beginning, ANCA had determined to institutionalize the award and decided to fund the award regardless of external support. Good planning, good dinner conversation, and recognition of potential opportunities resulted in the establishment of this hallmark ANCA award. ANCA owes a huge debt of gratitude to the Merrill G. and Emta E. Hastings Foundation and has committed long-term to maintaining the ANCA Nature Center Leadership Award. 🌿

Award Recipients are:

2000 - Dr. H. Lewis Batts

Kalamazoo Nature Center

2001 - Dr. Robert Thomas

Loyola University, Center for Environmental Communications (founding director, Louisiana Nature Center)

2002 - Mike Riska

Delaware Nature Society

2003 - Charity Krueger

Aullwood Audubon Center and Farm
2004 - Dr. Charles “Corky” McReynolds
Treehaven Environmental Learning Center

2005 - Tracy Kay

formerly with Schuylkill Center for Environmental Education & Rye Nature Center

2006 - Gordon Maupin

The Wilderness Center

2007 - Rich Patterson

Indian Creek Nature Center

2008 - Jack Shea

Teton Science Schools

Pat Welch is the executive director of the Pine Jog Environmental Education Center, College of Education, Florida Atlantic University, where she has served since 1982. Pat is a founding member and past president of ANCA, and served on the board of directors for 11 years. Other service includes Palm Beach County Environmentally Sensitive Lands Acquisition Committee, Leadership Palm Beach County Board of Directors, and Palm Beach County Education Network.

The Beginning of Peer Consults:

The absolute true story

Corky McReynolds
Director
Treehaven Environmental Learning
Center
Tomahawk, WI

I was attending my first meeting as a new board member of ANCA in the fall of 1991. We were meeting in Washington, DC, tagging along with a national environmental education meeting. I remember a table set up in the lobby with Beer Nuts and we were attracting lots of attention, or maybe that was because of Bob Thomas, but I digress.

Back then, ANCA was a project of the National Institute of Urban Wildlife, and we had some seed funding from the Edison Electric Institute but not enough funding for the board to conduct face-to-face meetings.

During the ANCA board meeting we were discussing the need to meet more often. Someone said, "Hey, we should meet at someone's nature center and have them pay for it."

We all laughed and continued discussion of other business which I think included which brand of Beer Nuts was better than the other.

All of a sudden, in one of those rare but lucid moments the earlier statement instantly made sense. I suggested that the ANCA board offer to a nature center the opportunity to host the ANCA board. They pay for our expenses and in return the board will provide the host center a day of consulting. Everybody seemed to think that was a terrific idea and I was rewarded with a few extra Beer Nuts!

After the board meeting and sometime in early winter, I realized that if the idea was going to develop into

reality someone needed to step up to the plate and take a swing. I received funding from the Treehaven Foundation to cover the travel expenses for the ANCA board in return for a day of consulting.

On a very, very cold weekend in March 1992 the board convened in northern Wisconsin at Treehaven to conduct the inaugural Peer Consult. The first day was spent in an ANCA board meeting and the next day was



photo by Tim Sandsmark

Since 1992 ANCA Consult teams have provided sage advice and timely assistance to 33 nature centers from Alaska (pictured here) to Florida.

dedicated for consulting to Treehaven.

The board examined Treehaven's programs and services, compared them to the mission statement, and expertly noted Treehaven provided outdoor recreation that was not part of the existing mission statement. My supervisor was present and agreed to the recommendations, which quickly resulted in a revised mission statement for Treehaven that we still use today.

For the evening activity I suggested to the board, for entertainment purposes, that we tune in our local Rhinelander TV station for its late news program. It happened to be

Friday the 13th. During the broadcast the very professional news anchor Susan Simon turned to the sports reporter and said to him, "You don't believe in the superstition of today do you?" "Of course not," he began to reply, then suddenly he literally fell off his chair and disappeared from the screen. A stunned Susan looked into the direction of the now empty position and exclaimed, "YOU... YOU... YOU KNOB!!!"

The very next morning it was Susan's assignment to travel to Treehaven and interview the ANCA board for a news report. After all, it was very big news to have a national meeting in our area. As it would happen, Susan was walking up the sidewalk to our main entrance just as Bob Thomas was walking down the hall. He saw her, opened the door for her and with his charming southern Louisiana accent asked, "I just have one question, what's a knob?"

Thus began ANCA's Peer Consults, which continue today to

promote and support leadership and management practices for the nature and environmental learning profession. 🌿

Corky McReynolds has 30 years of successful development and administration of two environmental learning centers. He has been director of Treehaven Environmental Learning Center since 1985. He was on ANCA's board of directors from 1990 - 1999, serving as president the last two years. He has been on 32 Peer Consults and acted as Team Leader on 25 of these (give or take a few). Corky received ANCA's 2004 Nature Center Leadership Award.

To date ANCA consult teams have conducted 74 consults in 33 states.

Treehaven Environmental Learning Center, Tomahawk, WI
Greenway and Nature Center of Pueblo, Pueblo, CO
Shaw Arboretum, St. Louis, MO
Stennis Space Flight Center, Nicholson, MS
Pocono Environmental Education Center, Dingmans Ferry, PA
Sarasota County Dept. of Natural Resources, Sarasota, FL
Chippewa Nature Center, Midland, MI
Thomas Irvine Dodge Nature Center, St. Paul, MN
Chattanooga Nature Center, Chattanooga, TN
Louisiana Nature Center and Aquarium, New Orleans, LA
Aldo Leopold Nature Center, Madison, WI
Loxahatchee Nature Center, West Palm Beach, FL
GreenPrint Council/Blandin Foundation, Marine-on-St.-Croix, MN
Polk County Conservation Board, Des Moines, IA
Department of Environmental Protection, Hartford, CT
Center for Wildlife Ed. Georgia So. Univ., Statesboro, GA
Cincinnati Nature Center, Cincinnati, OH
Great Smoky Mountains Institute, Townsend, TN
Pine Jog Environmental Ed. Center, West Palm Beach, FL
Teton Science Schools, Kelly, WY
Northlake Nature Center, Covington, LA
Fontenelle Forest Association, Omaha, NE
Great Meadows Project, Warrenton, VA
Jean Ellen DuPont Shehan Audubon Sanctuary, Easton, MD
Mountain Natural Heritage Learning Center, ?? NC
Nature Center at Shaker Lakes, Cleveland, OH
Callaway Gardens, Pine Mountain, GA
Pocono Environmental Education Center, Dingmans Ferry, PA
Lee and Rose Warner Nature Center, St. Paul, MN
Mohonk Preserve, New Paltz, NY
Russell W. Peterson Urban Wildlife Center, Wilmington, DE
Audubon Greenwich, Greenwich, CT
Nixon Park Nature Center, York, PA
Kalamazoo Nature Center, Kalamazoo, MI
Dickson County Nature Center, Spirit Lake, IA
FARMS Leadership, Inc., Winters, CA
Yellowstone Institute, Yellowstone National Park, WY
Wildcat Bluff Nature Center, Amarillo, TX
Irvine Nature Center, Stevenson, MD
Strawberry Hill Nature Center, Fairfield, PA
Severson Dells Nature Foundation, Rockford, IL
Lake Katherine Nature Preserve, Palos Heights, IL
Elkhart Environmental Center, Elkhart, IN
Matagorda Bay Nature Center, Matagorda, TX
Bear Creek Nature Preserve, Lancaster, TX
Louise Kreher Forest Ecology Preserve, Auburn, AL
Eastern Kentucky PRIDE, Somerset, KY
Centers For Nature Education, Marcellus, NY
Wolf Creek Park Enviro. Ed. Center, Fayetteville, WV
Douglas-Hart Nature Center, Mattoon, IL
Wild Bear Center for Nature Discovery, Nederland, CO
Audubon Louisiana Nature Center, New Orleans, LA
Harriet Wetherill, Plymouth Meeting, PA
Shaw Nature Reserve, Gray Summit, MO
Frick Environmental Center, Pittsburgh, PA
Leslie Science Center, Ann Arbor, MI
Ogden Nature Center, Ogden, UT
Crow's Neck Environmental Education Center, Tishomingo, MS
Black Swamp Bird Observatory, Oak Harbor, OH
DeVries Nature Conservancy, Owosso, MI
Ruffner Mountain Nature Center, Birmingham, AL
University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC
Evergreen Naturalist Audubon Society, Evergreen, CO
Ozark Natural Science Center, Huntsville, AR
Dunes Learning Center, Chesterton, IN
Ansonia Nature & Recreation Center, Ansonia, CT
Salem Audubon, Salem, OR
Clinton Community Nature Center, Clinton, MS
Westcave Nature Center, Austin, TX
Center for Alaskan Coastal Studies, Homer, AK
Carpenter Lake Nature Center, Southfield, MI
Au Sable Institute, Mancelona, MI
Asbury Woods Nature Center, Erie, PA
Wely Nature Center, Benoit, WI

Regional Summits:

An example from Ohio

Jim Berry
President
Roger Tory Peterson Institute
Jamestown, NY

Regional Summit meetings have evolved from the same tradition that spawned ANCA itself, the tradition of nature center directors sharing best practices to improve the administration of their centers.

An early peer-support network used as a model for Regional Summits comes from Ohio. At the time, Ohio's nonprofit nature centers numbered seven, but were widely spaced and their directors interacting in the twos and threes at statewide environmental education workshops. The year was 1987 when things began to change.

A meeting of nature center directors was held at the Glen Helen Outdoor Education Center in Yellow Springs. It was an informal gathering to discuss trends in the field and management issues. Ralph E. Ramey, the Glen's director at the time, was well known as an environmental leader in Ohio and was a legendary field biologist, best known for his prairie restoration work and his dogged defense of natural areas threatened by developers. Ralph's organizational skills were also honed during earlier stints as administrator for the Ohio Department of Natural Resources and the Columbus & Franklin County Metropolitan Park District.

Gordon Maupin recalls, "I think I'd have to say that Ralph Ramey started the first thing I might call a Regional Summit. It was 1987 or early '88, as my son had just been born. I went anyway because of the need I had to connect to another nature center director. There was no agenda; it was just a chance for us to get together and talk."


I had come to the Cincinnati Nature Center in 1986 from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources like Ralph. I first met him at The Ohio State University in 1971, when he was an Interpretive Work graduate

student and I was an undergrad. I too had a need to connect to my colleagues, because running a nonprofit was very different from anything I had experienced in the public sector.

Also at the meeting were Joan and Bob Heidelberg, co-executive directors from the Bruckner Nature Center in Troy, and Charity Krueger from Aullwood Audubon Center & Farm in Dayton. The purpose of the meeting was to share experiences and to provide support because nature center directors didn't quite fit into the other nonprofit professional support groups.

Another purpose of the meeting was for Ralph to show off the new auditorium facility that sported a lot of cool (at the time) AV features: things like actually being able to change to the next slide by pushing a button from the podium, a projection screen that descended from the ceiling with the push of a button, and a working PA system!

It was a great day and we all looked forward to the next meeting, which was hosted by the Heidelbergs. Gordon brings us through the next 22 years by adding, "We decided it would be a good idea to keep meetings. This led to a series of informal gatherings. We began to meet twice a year for a while. Whoever agreed to host would put together a little agenda and everyone just sat around a table and talked. We did begin to call them ANCA events once ANCA got going. We just did it and didn't ask anyone as far as I know."

ANCA was founded right after our Ohio Regional Summits began, thus enlarging peer-support to the national stage. 

Jim Berry is a naturalist and nature center director who has spent the past 14 years as the president of the Roger Tory Peterson Institute of Natural History in Jamestown, NY. His first posting in the field was in 1972 as nature center manager at Hueston Woods State Park in Ohio. Jim's background includes wildlife rehabilitation and interpretive farm experience.

Looking Ahead

At the Teton Summit in August 2008, Francis Velazquez posed the following question to his fellow ANCA members, “What will the next 20 years bring?” In this article, Francis reports on the discussion. This is a conversation that needs to continue among our members and we encourage all of you, through the listserv and articles submitted for publication in *Directions*, to share your thoughts and wisdom on the direction nature and environmental learning centers and ANCA will need to take in the next 20 years. And then, read on to learn what Don Watson considers “Natural Opportunities” for nature centers to explore.

What will the next 20 years bring?

Francis Velazquez
Manager of Education
Nixon County Parks
York, PA

At the ANCA summit this past August I had the opportunity to facilitate a session entitled “The Nature Center of the Future.” The session was inspired by a commercial where the catch phrase is “Imaginating tomorrow’s solutions today.” This opened my eyes. Why shouldn’t I be “imaginating” and solving tomorrow’s nature center challenges today? I suspected that with busy schedules, workloads and all of nature to explore we as a group weren’t “imaginating.” What better place than an ANCA Summit to ponder the future?

Did I really expect any answers? No. Rather a sense of where to put some effort to prepare for the future. Maybe a list of questions, questions about what we don’t know and think we need to know. Unbeknownst to me, I was thinking about looking ahead just before ANCA takes a moment to look behind on its 20th anniversary. This issue of *Directions* seems the perfect place to report the vision of the future that your ANCA colleagues put together that August afternoon.

The greatest challenge to “imaginating” is to drop all preconceptions about what a nature center should be and the future should look like. My method was speaking to a wide range of people who don’t work in nature centers – business leaders, county planners, academics, community organizers, and more – knowing full well that in Jackson Hole the nature center viewpoint would be well represented.

At the start of the session, to see

if all nature center people were created equal, we looked at how we all became “hooked” on nature. This list boiled down to: close proximity to the outdoors, presence of mentor(s), unplanned outings, and frequent exposure to nature. We generally all agreed that what worked on us still works today and should work tomorrow.

The group then went on to list the experiences nature centers are providing today. As you would expect, the list contained the usual suspects plus a few new items. This list included: after-school programs, internships, nature explorers’ classroom, inquiry-based field trips for all ages, nature preschools, summer camps, evening camps, on-site and off-site exposure to habitats, family programming, mentoring, outdoor-related nature recreation programs, and urban nature centers.

The group was then charged to try to leave their preconceptions behind and scatter, in small groups or alone, to ponder “What will nature centers be in 20–30 years?” Listed here are the responses that returned to the tent from the Wyoming sunshine. Nature centers in 20–30 years:

- will be out of business, they will be absorbed by another entity or moved into a school;
- will go to the users;
- will be housed in a shared facility;
- will be clean (for the ecophobic and germophobic) and safe (from ticks and bad people);
- will emphasize family and multi-generational programs;
- will be connected to the commu-

nity by various transportation modes;

- will have strong school and community support;
- will participate in exchanges between urban centers and rural centers;
- will be competition-oriented;
- will undergo a boom as people relearn about nature, and will be seen as the purveyors of knowledge;

- will be a self-insured industry;
- will be small, local, and neighborhood-oriented.

How do we get ready for 2028 and beyond? We are doing many things already.

This became evident

when participants made a list of what “good” practices we had in place that will prepare our industry for the future. This list included: using business models, outreach to schools, ANCA becoming a think tank and web network, moving beyond tree-hugger (stereotype) and being seen as professionals, thinking about how to direct future action, being open to change, aware nature is necessary, and developing nature centers in urban areas.

A second “other” list was prepared. This listed practices and areas of knowledge that the group felt will be needed or improved upon for the future. This listed included: we are giving our services away and need to make them seen as commodities, how to make nature personally important, end doom and gloom environmental messages, not addressing diversity (ethnic) in staff and programming, community gardens, understanding future communities needs and challenges, social justice, and satellite

Nature centers need to begin “imaginating” tomorrow’s solutions today.

sites – smaller nature center but more of them with local connections with communities.

What did the group pick as the top items from both of these lists? Currently nature centers are not addressing diversity (ethnic) in staff and programming. As minority populations grow, increasing diversity in customers, staff, and board members was the top vote getter.

Coming in second was understanding future communities' needs and challenges. How do we tap into what the community is planning for, have a seat at community planning table, understand the effects of changing demographics in our communities across the whole spectrum of community needs and issues not just nature and the environment?

Tied in third were ANCA becoming a think tank and satellite sites – smaller nature center but more of them. Smaller centers allow us to be where the customer is, still educating but avoiding the expenses of a major center.

It is only at a setting like an ANCA Summit, and with fellow professionals, that this session or anything like it could have been undertaken.

The issue of social justice was voted in a tie with community gardens as areas where nature centers could expand their role in the future.

What was learned? You have to be the judge. The group agreed that further learning, exploration, and discussion needs to happen. So if you have a hankering to facilitate a session at the 2009 Summit in New Hampshire, pick a topic.

The author apologizes to any participants whose ideas he mangled, and welcomes comments from fellow ANCAites at nixoncountypark@york-county.org.

Currently, Francis Velazquez is completing his 24th year working for the York County Department of Parks and Recreation, and serves in the position of Manager of Education. In addition to this work, he teaches part-time at York College of Pennsylvania in the department of biology, and in the past has co-taught week-long teacher workshops on the Susquehanna River.

Natural Opportunities

Don Watson
FAIA, CIP
EarthRise design
Trumbull, CT

For 2009 and beyond, consider how nature centers can help communities rebuild the natural capital of soil, vegetation, and water resources.

The following opportunities are “naturals” for nature centers to educate and lead our communities towards economic and environmental sustainability. In preparing your strategic planning, consider the assets that nature centers may offer:

- *Native landscape reduces maintenance costs and improves soil and water quality.*

It is economically and environmentally beneficial to reduce mowing to once/twice yearly, reducing motorized maintenance costs and negative environmental impact of lawns in public parks and roadways. Many nature centers are models of this practice already. But most municipalities need to learn that these measures reduce cost, improve safety (reduced roadway accidents to maintenance workers), and increase water quality.

- *Wetlands support a variety of biotic life, are buffers from storms and flooding, and are an essential part of low-impact/low cost storm-water infrastructure.*

Communities are at increasing risk of flooding (and drought) due to loss of the natural role of landscape, especially around wetlands, streams, and vernal pools. In many cases, it means leave what is there. In others, it means replant buffer zones. In some cases, mitigated wetlands can reduce costs of storm-water infrastructure and can be part of bio-remediation of polluted lands and waters.

- *Community-based agriculture increases food security and reduces*

costs.

Community gardens got many families through the 1930s' depression and WWII years. Arable land that was once used for farming should be preserved and to the extent possible returned to local food production. Teaching and learning the skills of organic food production appeals to volunteers of all ages.

These three practices are highlights only – you know of others. Some can be implemented while

reducing costs and engaging volunteers in programs. All address the economic challenges of 2009 and beyond. Make sure that when national leaders call “infrastructure investments,” the role of natural landscape and watersheds are understood as the most

economical and sustainable options. Better yet, place the knowledge and skill of how to restore and extend our natural capital in the hands of our local community youth, volunteers, and supporters.

Familiar? Yes? You know it. They don't.

Opportunity: nature centers have something to offer to address economic hardship and environmental loss. Every municipality is a candidate for lessons that can be taught and demonstrated by nature centers.

Donald Watson is principal of EarthRise design, specializing in planning and design of nature centers, botanical gardens, and museums. He is a Certified Interpretive Planner (CIP) and author of the ANCA Best Practice monographs Interpretive Design for Nature Centers: Exhibits and Buildings. Interpretive planning resources can be downloaded from www.DonaldWatson.com.



photo by Christine Turnbull

Community gardens, like this one at Moose Hill Community Farm, MA, are economically and environmentally beneficial today and into the future.

directions

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directions

Summit Hosts & Locations

Summit I - 1995

Treehaven Environmental Learning Center
Tomahawk, WI

Summit II - 1996

Aullwood Audubon Center & Farm, Dayton, OH

Summit III - 1997

Roger Tory Peterson Institute & Jamestown Audubon
Center, Jamestown, NY

Summit IV - 1998

Ijams Nature Center & Great Smoky Mountains
Institute, Knoxville, TN

Summit V - 1999

Rio Grande Nature Center, Albuquerque, NM

Summit VI - 2000

Delaware Nature Society, Wilmington, DE

Summit VII - 2001

Lake Erie Nature & Science Center, Cleveland, OH

Summit VIII - 2002

The Summit with Altitude!
Lookout Mountain Nature Center, Golden, CO

Summit IX - 2003

Wilderness, Plain & Simple
The Wilderness Center, Wilmot, OH

Summit X - 2004

Being Ever Green
IslandWood, Bainbridge Island, WA

Summit XI - 2005

Great Lakes - Great Summit
Chippewa Nature Center, Midland, MI

Summit XII - 2006

Lone Star Summit
McKinney Roughs Nature Park, Austin, TX

Summit XIII - 2007

Green & Gold Summit
Schlitz Audubon Nature Center, Milwaukee, WI

Summit XIV - 2008

The Teton Summit
Teton Science Schools, Jackson Hole, WY

Summit XV - August 26-29, 2009

The Granite State Summit
Squam Lakes Natural Science Center, Holderness, NH