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spring 2014

# directions

Journal of the Association of Nature Center Administrators

## Beyond Boundaries: ANCA Summit XX Hosted by Kalamazoo Nature Center Aug. 20-23

Certain places have a magic that draws people to them. Cooper's Glen, one of the best-loved spots in Kalamazoo County, MI, has possessed this power for centuries.

There is evidence that Native Americans camped near the Glen prior to European settlement. Some of the first European residents lived close to the Glen, building their homes in the clearings made famous by James Fenimore Cooper in his book, "The Oak Openings." Later families and friends traveled out from Kalamazoo by dirt road, by boat along the Kalamazoo River or on the inter-urban railway to Cooper's Glen.

Families went for picnics, biology students for field study, ama-



Nature's Way Preschool – Kalamazoo Nature Center

teur and professional ornithologists, photographers, and botanists to observe and enjoy the varied wildflowers and other plant life. In the late 1950's, gravel mining and commercialism threatened Cooper's Glen. An inspired group of community leaders purchased the land and established what would become known as the Kalamazoo

Nature Center.

Dr. H. Lewis Batts, Jr. was a nationally known environmentalist and the driving force behind the purchase of Cooper's Glen and the incorporation of the Kalamazoo Nature Center in 1960. The vision of Dr. Batts and the other founders

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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 more than 600 members, ANCA is the leader in the profession.



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"Zorro" Termas de Huiife - Chile  
photo courtesy of Global Organization of Tree Climbers



# Director's Notes

## Best Practices at Work

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

As a best practices organization, we strive to 'walk the talk.' At our February board retreat, the ANCA board made an important decision. ANCA's 2013 fiscal year produced a cash surplus. Knowing that our strategic plan articulated building both the endowment and cash reserves, the board voted to split the surplus, putting half into the endowment and the other half into operating reserves.

Many centers have experienced the occasional windfall or surplus. There is always an abundance of great ideas on how to spend that money for the mission. A good strategic plan clearly spells out the priorities and good governance and management practice is to weigh those well-vetted plans against all those great ideas of how to spend that money.

There are times when an opportunity to grow and strengthen the organization's impact needs to be seized upon. However, in most cases, the priorities spelled out in a good plan are your best bet. Following best practices pays big dividends in the long run.

Speaking of the future - several ANCA members have retired in the past few years, and although their centers worked hard to replace them, losing a long-time leader can leave an uncertain future. Long-time leaders possess not only high levels of skills acquired over many years, but they also maintain institutional knowledge. How do we retain this retiring workforce in ANCA?



We are working to develop an emeritus membership program. Through this program we hope to prevent any possible negative effects retiring members may have on the composition of our membership and to provide a new audience with benefits to staying engaged with ANCA. As a start, we have been working with Andrea Wilkins, a graduate student at Antioch University New England, to research successful methods of engaging retired members used by other professional associations. Andrea has conducted a literature review, interviewed retired and soon-to-be retired ANCA members, and is in the process of writing her final report. Her report, plus input from veteran members, will be used to develop our program.

Benefits to ANCA of an emeritus program will include engaging a growing body of volunteers to serve as mentors, consultants, board members, donors, and advocates for the profession. Of course the program will need to be mutually beneficial with opportunities for networking with friends and former colleagues, staying connected to the profession, and contributing to the future workforce through mentoring and training opportunities. 🌱

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**25 Tips: To bring volunteers to your organization & make them want to stay!**

*Remember, individuals (and groups) that contact you to be volunteers, want to contribute their time (and share talents) with your organization and help support your mission. The tips below can help create a win-win for everyone – the volunteer enjoys his/her experiences with your organization while you develop a strong volunteer base that supports and expands your programming and mission.*

1. Make volunteers feel welcome! At special events provide a check-in station that can direct volunteers to their work area or on their first day volunteering offer a tour of the office or facilities including restrooms. Greet volunteers when they arrive even it is a simple “hello.” Smile, be friendly, be approachable and show your enthusiasm – volunteers want to feel appreciated and enjoy spending time around you and your agency!
2. Treat volunteers as part of your professional team – hold them to the same standards as your paid staff. To visitors/clients, they ARE part of your staff.
3. Train sufficiently. Make sure volunteers have the tools/knowledge necessary to succeed.
4. Make coffee or water available, a candy jar filled with treats and food or snacks for events or trainings is always appreciated.
5. Introduce volunteers to other staff members – part of feeling comfortable with your organization is knowing the names of the staff members.
6. Remember the names of your regularly scheduled volunteers, when possible take time to inquire about how their day/week has been.
7. Introduce volunteers to each other before engaging them in their volunteer opportunity – this will help make working together a little easier. Provide volunteers with name tags (or a volunteer shirt or hat) especially when they are volunteering with the public – this makes them feel part of your organization’s team, identifies them with your organization, and reinforces the professional standards you expect from the volunteer when representing your organization.
8. Set expectations. Be clear with your volunteers about what is expected of them. Tell them what you need accomplished and act as a resource should they have questions or concerns.
9. Provide confirmation letters (or e-mails) that contain important information about a special event or activity they are helping with – include starting and ending times, what to wear, where to park/check-in, and who to call with a question or concern.
10. Be respectful of their time and talents. Give them a purpose – no one wants to stand around because there isn’t enough work to be done. If it looks like volunteers are idle, either send a few home, or think of a new project they can work on instead.
11. Be realistic when assigning tasks to volunteers. Know their strengths (or weakness) and place them accordingly. If needed, consider reassigning a volunteer to a different position that better fits their skills.
12. Be honest. Don’t be afraid to tell your volunteers exactly what your organization needs or what volunteer positions are currently available.
13. Create ground rules. Volunteers are eager to help, and while they aren’t actual employees, they still need to adhere to your organization’s policies.

(continued on page 4)

## Volunteers

(continued from page 3)


14. Make sure you share organizational policies and procedures on operations and safety as well as other important rules or guidelines before your volunteers get started.
15. Set time parameters for service. Most people have a busy schedule and volunteers are no exception. Let your volunteers know how long their help will be needed for an event or specific project.
16. Plan ahead! Volunteers are busy people and appreciate being contacted early for special events, if they like volunteering for your organization they want to get the event on their calendars as soon as possible.
17. Be prepared. Gather any necessary supplies and clear a workspace in advance of your volunteers' arrival. Once they arrive, don't keep them waiting. If you expect punctuality, lead by example.
18. When other staff members are asked to supervise volunteers, make them (the staff member) feel comfortable in this role. If needed, provide them with training on working with or supervising volunteers.
19. Track volunteer hours and positions/jobs volunteers have done for your organization. A volunteer may ask you to verify their service for college or job applications, scholarships or other awards. This is also critical for your organization when applying for grants or completing your agency's 990.
20. Your board members are volunteers for your organization, so remember to include them in your recognition program and offer the appropriate training for their role on your board.
21. Provide feedback. Congratulate your volunteers on a job well done and offer helpful suggestions for improvement, when needed. Do both accolades and coaching in a timely fashion to maximize behavior modification.
22. Follow good business practices by returning phone calls and emails in a timely fashion, proof correspondence for accuracy and remember confidentiality of volunteer's personal information.
23. Show appreciation. Thank your volunteers! Sometimes simple gestures of thanks are sufficient. For volunteers who contribute their time consistently or have made a strong impact on your organization, consider sending special cards, creating an awards program or inviting them to volunteer appreciation events.
24. A volunteer should feel comfortable saying "Sorry, I am not available for this specific event" and know that you will call them again! (Note: If this happens regularly, or a volunteer keeps cancelling at the last minute, speak with the volunteer to see if they would prefer not being contacted or would like to discontinue volunteering for your organization. While this is hard to do, it would be better in the long run for everyone.)
25. Invest in your volunteers, especially if they are part of your daily operations team – offer ongoing enrichment, training, workshops, field trips, and social activities to strengthen their skill sets and further develop your relationships with these amazing individuals.

*This list compiled by:*

*Cathy Devendorf, Director of Volunteers and Outreach, Chippewa Nature Center*

*Nina Lapitan, Volunteer Coordinator, Aullwood Audubon Center and Farm*

*Angela Williamson, CVA, Volunteer Coordinator at the Hagley Museum and Library in Delaware*



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was to provide programming that went “Beyond the Boundaries” of what was expected for the times.

Dr. Batts continued to serve as the center’s volunteer Executive Director until his retirement in 1988. Then, Dr. Willard M. Rose was hired to lead the organization into the future and continue to push “Beyond Boundaries” to create new programs to meet the need in today’s society.

Today, the Kalamazoo Nature Center (KNC) is recognized for its long history of leading-edge programs. KNC has earned this reputation by demonstrating a continual commitment to developing quality environmental programs for all ages. The Nature Center’s property encompasses more than 1,100 acres of prairie, woodlands, fields, marshes, ponds, and streams which you will enjoy as you hike some of the 14 trails or paddle down the Kalamazoo River.

KNC’s Conservation Stewardship team protects and manages the land at KNC as well as provides land assessments, invasive species removal, prescribed burns, and prairie plantings for individuals and organizations throughout the state. The Conservation Stewardship department is widely recognized for avian research, citizen science projects, and imperiled butterfly studies, to name a few.


KNC is a multi-faceted organization which has offered public programs and camps to the community for more than 50 years. In 2013, KNC completed a successful multi-million dollar No Child Left Inside capital campaign and as a result, celebrated the groundbreaking of the new award-winning KNC Camp and Nature’s

### Way Preschool Facilities.

While participating in the 2014 ANCA Summit, you will visit KNC Camp while enjoying bonfires, entertainment, vendor booths and, if you are adventurous, a zipline canopy tour! Nature’s Way Preschool will be the site of the National Nature-Based Preschool Conference, one of the offered workshops. Heronwood Field Station, KNC’s newest program, designed for high school students interested in environmental studies in partnership with the public schools as an Education for Employment elective, will be included in the offered activities. You will have the opportunity to visit the Heronwood Field Station, and KNC’s DeLano Farms, a sustainable working farm. DeLano Farms features a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program along with a series of educational programs enjoyed by school children, campers, and the public. The animal Farmyard at the site is a popular summer attraction for all ages.

Field trip options include visits to the beautiful Lake Michigan shores, paddling down the Kalamazoo River, and sampling some of the best wineries and breweries that Michigan has to offer. Throughout the Summit you will enjoy activities, great food, fun, and friends.

KNC staff invites ANCA to experience all that Kalamazoo and “Beyond Boundaries” has to offer. Registration opens April 15 and remember...No Sharks, No Salt, No Worries.

Learn about all of the programs at KNC with a visit to our new mobile-friendly website. 

**Summit Registration: [Click Here](#)**

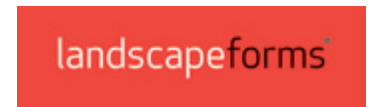


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# Profile:

## Get Hooked on Nature: Ben Klasky at TEDxRainier

Dealing with “nature deficit disorder” in kids and understanding and reacting to the imperative to get children outdoors is a critical issue that all nature centers must face. We recently heard about a TEDx talk that Ben Klasky, President and CEO of IslandWood in Washington, made about that very topic and we asked Iain MacLeod, Executive Director of the Squam Lakes Natural Science Center in New Hampshire, to find out more about the experience and the response to the talk. You can view Ben’s talk here: <http://bit.ly/1eRfGva>

*Iain:* How did the TEDx Talk come about? Did you pitch them the idea or did they approach you?

*Ben:* A colleague who had spoken at TEDx had seen me speak a few times, and suggested me to their leadership team. The TEDx team then screened me, and subsequently coached me along the way to ensure that the final product was up to their standards.

*Iain:* Do you have any reactions to the process of doing a TEDx Talk?

*Ben:* I give a lot of speeches and have a theatrical background, so I am pretty comfortable on stage. That said, this is an endeavor that really requires your A-game. There are 3-4 cameras walking around you and filming you from all angles. You get no notes, and no podium – there’s no place to hide. It’s just you, a microphone, and the audience. At the actual event, Murphy’s Law went into effect. Despite all my intense practice, the theater was experiencing technical difficulties. The slides I prepared weren’t progressing and the “feedback” monitors they had for me as a speaker went black. This was a bit unnerving, but it was also exhilarating and it all worked out.

*Iain:* What is the difference between Ted Talks and a TEDx?

*Ben:* TED is a global organization that shares big ideas via the spoken word. TED allows their

brand to be used at a regional level through various TEDx events. I spoke at the annual TEDxRainier event, which is based in Seattle and is one of the oldest TEDx regional productions.



illustration courtesy of nps.gov

*Iain:* What has been the response to the talk?

*Ben:* It’s been a lot of fun and has led to other opportunities. Perhaps the most rewarding thing has been watching people and brands that I really respect tweeting and discussing the Talk online. It feels like it’s really creating a dialogue around this issue. I’ve been asked to speak at a number of other engagements, based on people

seeing the Talk; the piece is being used in grad classes by professors; and...the Talk has led to my being selected as a blogger for the Huffington Post.

*Iain:* While you were researching the talk, what was the most dramatic statistic you uncovered?

*Ben:* The most dramatic statistics I found weren’t even used in my Talk because my advisors steered me in a different direction. I was originally researching how dangerous it is to spend time in the outdoors, because I believe that many parents resist letting their kids explore and play outside out of fear that their children may be hurt. I researched national statistics on outdoor-related deaths... and I mean every kind of death I could think of in the outdoors, including being hit by a car; boating accidents; falls (which were almost all people 65+ years of age); poisoning; and also less likely deaths such as bee stings; horseback riding; having a tree fall on you; and getting struck by lightning. It turns out that we should expect about 11,000 “outdoor-related” deaths in the US annually. This may sound like a lot until it’s compared to the 1.2 million people who die each year from just two causes – heart disease, and cancer – and these two diseases are ones that outdoor time has been proven to reduce your chances of getting. I found it shocking that

(continued on page 7)

we're 100x more likely to die of two diseases that are related to sitting on the couch indoors, yet we choose to have our kids stay inside for their safety. However, the TEDx folks thought this line of discussion was too gruesome, and strongly advised me to win my audience over by painting a positive solution/futures... so I saved this research for a different time. I'm planning to blog about it soon.

*Iain:* What was the audience feedback?

*Ben:* The audience was so supportive – both during and after my remarks. I think the warm/attentive audience is part of what makes the TED network so powerful; these people have self-selected to sit in a theater just to hear these Talks. Their energy was palpable during my time on the stage.

*Iain:* What has your center done to promote getting kids in nature?

*Ben:* Each year, IslandWood serves over 150 schools and thousands of kids from the Pacific Northwest, helping to introduce children (often for the first time) to nature. Many kids come to us “afraid that a cougar is going to eat them” (there are no known cougars on Bainbridge Island, by the way) and they return home dramatically more comfortable being in nature. Our evaluation shows that kids also learn a lot of science, and build a sense of stewardship when they are with us. IslandWood was intentionally built only a half-hour ferry ride from Seattle's downtown corridor, so we are able to serve the most urban-based kids from our region.

*Iain:* Describe the app you are developing to get kids outdoors.

*Ben:* We're very excited about this. As I mention in my remarks,

children are getting an average of more than 8 hours of screen time daily. Technology has always played a key role in how IslandWood works with children in the outdoors. We are going to coopt the captivating nature of technology, to get kids off the couch and into the outdoors. The app we're developing will be game-like in some ways; kids will be assigned on “missions” into the outdoors, where they will compete with friends around the world to earn badges by completing activities. We're launching it with a partner in Western Australia and their initials are W.A. just like the WA from Washington state. We're joking that at launch, we'll have a competition to see which WA gets the most kids outside. We're in negotiations with some big partners to ensure we have quality content and distribution – including National Geographic, Scholastic, and The North Face.

*Iain:* What resources did you uncover that were most helpful in researching the Talk?

*Ben:* The Children and Nature Network has pulled together a lot of useful data with peer-reviewed studies about the benefits of time in nature. I also found a number of people who were supportive and served as great resources in this venture. For instance, a professional photographer let me have

full access to some of his best-known photos of kids playing on New York streets in the 50's. So many people were willing to help when they heard about the point of my Talk.

*Iain:* What is the overarching take-home message that you want to pass on to an ANCA audience.

*Ben:* With ANCA, I'm preaching to the choir, but...it's vital for our children's physical and mental health that they spend time outdoors. Up until very recently, kids spent time outdoors on a daily basis but this is no longer the case and it's having a profound negative impact on them. As parents, we want what's best for our children so we need to take a (perceived) risk and let our kids play and explore outdoors. As I said in my talk, we give prisoners and free-range chickens plenty of outdoor time; we need to do the same for our kids. 🌿



# From The Field:

## Go Climb a Tree!

starting a recreational tree climbing program

Harv Teitelbaum  
President  
Global Organization of Tree  
Climbers  
Evergreen, CO

“Go climb a tree.” Maybe you’ve heard this expression. It’s usually an indication that you’re bothering someone who wants to be left alone. But when someone tells me to go climb a tree, I might just say “thank you,” and go grab my gear!

I climb trees. I climb all kinds of trees, in all kinds of settings from city to wilderness, in all seasons. This is not the same kind of tree climbing many of us did as kids, the hand-over-hand “free climbing” that used to get us yelled at by our parents. No, Recreational Tree Climbing (RTC) is done with arborist ropes, saddles and helmets, using safe, easy-to-learn techniques developed over many years.

But I and the community of recreational/technical tree climbers around the world don’t just climb trees. Some of us take others up into trees (facilitate), while some even train others how to climb, how to facilitate climbs, or how to themselves teach these skills to others (instruct).

I personally have conducted thousands of climbers up into the trees. Worldwide, over the approximately 30 years that RTC

has been an organized activity, facilitators following guidelines developed by our community and standardized by umbrella groups such as the Global Organization



photo courtesy of Tree Climbing Colorado  
used with permission

*“On rope!” in Thompson Park, Longmont, CO*

of Tree Climbers (GOTC), have safely conducted about a half-million individual climbs up into the crowns of wonderful trees.

Your venue can be part of this wonderful activity! RTC as a program offering at nature centers, arboreta, and other outdoor experiential/environmental centers is growing across North America.

It’s easy and straightforward to start programs, and there are several ways to do so.

But perhaps we should back up and ask the question “Why climb trees?” or “What’s so great about Tree Climbing?”

Humans have always been in trees. Our ancestors lived, ate, slept, and hunted from trees. Trees were where we found safety from predators. Trees were home. Researchers such as the evolutionary biologist Donald Perry find much evidence that we are not solely terrestrial, but “scansorial,” a species at home both on the ground and in the trees.

Many tree climbers experience that same sense of coming home, of feeling safe and secure, being at peace, once up in a tree. I’ve even had a few climbers become completely still and silent, overcome by the feelings they experience on high. Some are even in

tears when, reluctantly, they have to come back down to earth. One woman, while up in “Gramps,” a 200-year old ponderosa at the Tree Climbing Colorado home grove, said this: “I don’t know how to explain it. How do you explain it? It’s... unbelievable! Life, that’s

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what you feel up here.”

Research done at Kyoto University in Japan has revealed clear correlations between tree climbing and human psychological health and well being. Even being around trees and forests was shown to be effective, even therapeutic, in maintaining emotional health. Simply walking through the forest in Japan, known as Shinrin Yoku or “forest bathing,” is a widespread practice known for improving ecopsychological health. And, . . . it’s just plain exhilarating, eye-opening, invigorating, exercising . . . fun!

RTC gets kids, youth, adults, couples, families off the ground and into the canopy, where they enjoy the views of the surrounding landscape, nature, wildlife, breezes, and more. Kids love it, and it helps get them moving

and exercising, away from their screens and tablets, and together with their friends and families. Beyond that, RTC adds value to the center or facility, increasing visitor-ship and the constituency of those supporting nature facilities, trees, and forests.

There are two ways centers can incorporate RTC programs into their activities offerings. First, an outside RTC facilitator can be contacted and programs dis-

cussed. The outside facilitator will normally carry his/her own insurance and provide all necessary equipment. He or she will work with the center staff to select and prepare the most suitable tree(s), do effective marketing, and arrive at the best pricing/fee-sharing arrangements. As an example, many centers charge in the neighborhood of \$30-35/climber for an

can be offered.

As an alternative, centers can choose to have their own personnel trained to become in-house RTC facilitators. Specialized training from an RTC Instructor is needed. (RTC facilitation is considered a specialized skill set; training in tree care or arboriculture alone is not comparable.) The instructor could be someone who

is local, or one who is willing to travel to the center, or one to whom center personnel are willing to travel to be trained. The training normally includes two courses, a basic tree climbing course (even if personnel have other climbing experience) and a facilitators course.

The courses can often be taught concurrently, but

there is typically a waiting period, normally six months, before the first publicly-offered climb could be conducted by the new facilitators. During the waiting period, the facilitator-trainee gains RTC climbing experience and expertise, keeping logs on a prescribed number of climbs, and sharing/discussing these with the instructor before proceeding.



photo courtesy of Tree Climber Coalition, Joe and Bill Maher used with permission

Girl Scouts “Limb Walking” in Mary Alice.

approximately 2 1/2 hour climbing event, depending on youth/adult, in-district/out, etc., and share on either a 80/20 or 75/25 basis. Instead of percentage sharing, some facilitators simply ask for a flat fee, such as \$25/climber, and then let the center determine prices for climbers as it sees fit.

In addition to regularly scheduled group climbs open to the public, birthday climbs and climbs for other special occasions and groups

The Global Organization of Tree Climbers (GOTC) provides an excellent map-database of recognized facilitators and instructors around the world. It can be accessed at: <http://www.gotreeclimbing.org/go-climbing/climb-learn.html>

Does this sound appealing? It did to Jessica Jens, executive director of Riveredge Nature Center in Newburg, WI. She contacted me at Tree Climbing Colorado after reading an article about RTC programs, beginning a dialogue which eventually lead to five days of training staff from three nature organizations in Nov. 2013. These facilitator-trainees are excited for the arrival of this year's spring and summer, so that they can begin their own tree climbing programs.

You can find out more about Recreational Tree Climbing programs by contacting the GOTC at [info@gotreeclimbing.org](mailto:info@gotreeclimbing.org) or 303.877.1870, and by visiting our website, [www.gotreeclimbing.org](http://www.gotreeclimbing.org)

I look forward to meeting up with you in the canopy some day! 🌿

*Harv Teitelbaum is a GOTC-recognized tree climbing Facilitator and Master Instructor, and current and founding president of the Global Organization of Tree Climbers. When not among the trees, he is a Visiting Professor of Environmental Science at DeVry University. As a free-lance writer, Harv's commentaries on social, environmental, and political issues have appeared in regional newspapers and online publications. He was Treasurer of the Colorado chapter of Physicians for Social Responsibility.*



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*“ANCA is the network, we should never forget that!”*

– Patty Weisse, Emeritus Executive Director at Baltimore Woods

#### ANCA: A Circle of Leadership and Service

Patty Weisse joined ANCA soon after becoming the Executive Director of Baltimore Woods Nature Center in Marcellus, New York. In 2004 she attended her first Summit and was, “blown away by the network and the collective passion and wisdom of the nature center leadership.” She was truly “awe struck.” At the Summit she met people with similar professional challenges and everyone was willing to share wisdom in a supportive way. Patty returned to her center with new ideas and energy.

At the following Summit she learned of the Professional Leadership Institute (PLI), co-sponsored and taught at the Delaware Nature Society. She attended PLI where she learned how to improve employee policies, an important step in building capacity. In addition, she decided to have an ANCA Peer Consult to aid with the redirecting of Baltimore Woods. When the consult team arrived, “over 100 years of nature center administration walked in the door.” The team provided Patty with a plan, including the idea to rebrand the center. Although the path was not easy, it was well worth it in the end.



At the next Summit Patty met Greta Bolger who led a session on branding and marketing and emphasized the need to utilize the best branding and marketing tools to promote her center. It was a “watershed moment” and inspired her to rebrand the center with a beautiful, nurturing, and meaningful brand. Recognizing that Baltimore Woods was central New York’s premier provider of place-based environmental learning, Patty blazed a new path forward to spread the word among her community.

When Patty applied for a month long sabbatical grant that required a research project, she chose to visit another ANCA member, Milwaukee’s Urban Ecology Center, to learn about their sustainable funding model for school outreach programs. When the sabbatical was over, a local foundation recruited Baltimore Woods as a pilot nonprofit for a three-year capacity building program. They were looking for organizations that demonstrated an ability to challenge assumptions, embrace best practices, and move forward with a bold vision. “If it were not for ANCA”, Patty says, “they never would have considered Baltimore Woods. It was a cathartic process where the center self-assessed, and recognized, and changed beliefs that were holding it back. It helped us understand what drives our economic engine, and empowered us to make high-level decisions to strengthen and protect key earned income drivers.”

After 15 years of successful leadership, Patty was happy to pass the executive director torch on to Mary Kate Intaglietta in July 2013. Patty is pleased with the accomplishments made during her tenure at Baltimore Woods and proud that the nature center continues to move forward.

Patty is now giving back as a member of the ANCA board, a presenter at Summits, an ANCA mentor, and through service on ANCA Peer Consult teams. ANCA Executive Director Jen Levy states, “Patty has been an extremely valuable board member and mentor. She is passionate about the mission of ANCA and the mission of our members and eager and available to share her success and lessons learned. I am extremely grateful for her service to ANCA and to the profession. She exemplifies the generosity of the ANCA network.”

# More From The Field:

## You Should Have Known, but You Didn't the importance of background checks

Mike Harding  
Senior Loss Control & Risk  
Management Specialist  
Markel Insurance  
Glen Allen, VA

You can no longer rely on trust

You review the resume, conduct the interview, and make a job offer. It's a simple process, right? Wrong! What you don't know about a job applicant can hurt you and your nature center. It's not a good business practice to hire just anyone who walks through your door. It's also not a good practice to merely rely on trust. You should know both who they are and their history. Don't be a victim of deceit by simply looking at a resume or take someone's word they are honest and qualified. When it comes to your nature center, you cannot afford to take chances!

Conducting background checks on potential employees and volunteers should be a major part of your nature center's business process. Background checks can help reduce risk for criminal activities such as violence, abuse, and theft. They can also verify the information on an applicant's resume or job application and assist your nature center in deciding if an individual is the right person for the job.

Your nature center has a legal obligation to protect

Be mindful that employers have a legal obligation to protect their business, staff, and customers from any foreseeable act of an employee or volunteer. You don't want to end up in a negligent hiring situation due to poor hiring practices. If your nature center fails to conduct

### **When setting-up and implementing your background screening program, here are a few guidelines to remember:**

- *Create a written background check policy specifically for your nature center*
- *Follow all FCRA guidelines and federal, state, and local regulations*
- *Use a combination of screening products and develop job-specific searches*
- *Establish criteria to evaluate information – what will constitute disqualifying information*
- *Eliminate subjective opinions to ensure consistency when reviewing results*

a background check prior to hiring and an employee or volunteer commits a crime while on the job, your nature center assumes the liability for their actions.

"Negligent hiring" lawsuits are on the rise

Nature centers have a "duty of care" to protect staff and patrons from applicants the nature center knew—or should have known—posed a risk. For example, a newly "hired" volunteer positioned themselves close to a remote restroom and assaulted a school aged child

as she was using the facilities. It turned out that this person was on the sex offender registry, but the nature center never checked before accepting the applicant and allowing them full access to the center. The nature center's failure to conduct a thorough background check virtually ensured it was headed for a negligent-hiring suit.

It's important to remember you don't have unlimited rights to dig into someone's background or personal life, so you need to know what you can and can't do when conducting background checks. When hiring new employees or volunteers, you want as much information as possible to make smart decisions. But there's a caveat. Employees and volunteers have privacy rights in certain areas, and

it's a right they can enforce with legal charges if background checks are not conducted within the laws that govern this screening.

You need to become familiar with the Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA)

This act gives you, the employer and the applicant a fair method for processing reports for background screening. Under the FCRA, you're typically free to conduct

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background checks and use the information if you have a clear business interest, such as hiring, firing, reassigning, or promoting someone. But you can't run a job background check on a whim.

Prior to conducting a background check, you must supply the applicant with a "Summary of Your Rights under the Fair Credit Reporting Act" (applicant's rights) and obtain their written permission using an Authorization and Release Form. If you decide not to hire or promote someone based on information in their report, you must provide a copy of the report and inform the individual of his or her rights to challenge the report under the FCRA by supplying an Adverse Action Form.

If information should surface that someone is unfit for the job, your nature center can be held liable for negligent hiring. No business is immune from negligent hiring due to poor hiring practices. Negligent hiring is based on the premise that employers have an obligation to protect staff and clients from harm or injury (or "foreseeable" acts) caused by an employee. If a nature center fails to conduct a background check prior to hiring and a staff or volunteer commits an unspeakable act, your nature center assumes liability for their actions. This is why it's necessary for nature centers to perform due diligence and conduct background checks on every new hire, regardless of the size of your center. Volunteers, based on their contact with children and other vulnerable populations should also carefully be screened.

Therefore, it's important to


know what's permitted (and what's not) when checking a potential candidate's background and work history. All reports compiled and received by your nature center are subject to the laws of the FCRA. It's a good idea to consult with an attorney and perform legal research to gain knowledge on the laws on federal, state, and local levels (and the laws governing their access and use in the hiring decision making process (they can vary from state to state) prior to conducting pre-employment screening.

Background screening is your first line of defense

So then, what type of background checks best benefit your nature center? What types of background checks should you run? Not all "types" of background checks need to be performed for every job or position within your center. Most basic background checks involve criminal reports, Social Security number/address history and education/employment verification. The option always exists to expand a search beyond the basic screening components (most additional checks are usually determined by the job title or function).

Depending on the position and their role within your center, you can add additional searches such as sex offender registry, motor vehicle reports, professional licenses, credit history, and drug testing.

Now more than ever, nature centers should be careful about the quality of people they hire. Criminals and abusers look for employment opportunities at organizations that don't run background checks. Nature centers that have

a screening program know the importance of checking an applicant's history. The process doesn't need to be difficult or expensive. It's all about maintaining a safe nature center, protecting staff and patrons, assets, and reducing risk. There's no rule that says you have to hire a person from a group of applicants. If none of your candidates are right for the job, keep looking. You'll be glad you did. 

*Mike Harding is Sr. Loss Control and Risk Management Specialist for Markel Insurance Company with more than 20 years' experience in risk management, fleet / driver safety, risk consulting, and safety management encompassing a broad background that includes several corporate level risk management positions (including a Fortune 500 company). Mike is responsible for creating and implementing risk management programs in support of nature center, social service, and other industry groups for Markel. Mike is also responsible for providing educational services for clients and supporting their related industry trade associations through activities such as conducting risk management and crisis management workshops, developing safety guidelines, developing industry articles, visiting client sites, participating in industry initiatives, and creating risk control plans. Mike is a graduate of West Virginia University with an Undergraduate degree in Education and a Masters' degree in Safety and Risk Management. He is certified by the World Safety Organization as a Certified Safety Executive.*

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Background (cont. from page 13)

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- The FTC’s main FCRA site: [www.ftc.gov/os/statutes/fcrajump.shtml](http://www.ftc.gov/os/statutes/fcrajump.shtml)
  - An explanation of employer obligations under the law - [www.ftc.gov/os/statutes/fcradoc.pdf](http://www.ftc.gov/os/statutes/fcradoc.pdf)
  - For details about state FCRA laws, go to - [www.verifiedcredentials.com/docs/compliance/State%20FCRA%20Laws.doc](http://www.verifiedcredentials.com/docs/compliance/State%20FCRA%20Laws.doc)

### The Importance of Aligning with a Reputable Background Check Company

Not too long ago, only a few dozen companies offered background-checking services. This industry has since mushroomed in size and scope—but not necessarily quality—after post-9/11 many concerns drove up the demand for increased background screening.

The result: There are now many in the screening industry, making it difficult to sort out the top tier from the fly-by-night firms. Many sell cheap but incomplete background checks in minutes. Too often, they simply restate old information bought from private data brokers with no guarantee the data are current or correct.

How can your nature center determine just whom to select? The National Association of Professional Background Screeners (NAPBS), a 650-member industry group, recently unveiled a comprehensive, six-pronged certification and accreditation process.

The goal: Identify “gold standard” pre-employment screening firms that excel in the areas of consumer protection, legal compliance, client education, data quality, verification, and business practices.

These new standards address a longstanding concern of human resource professionals: the absence of a concrete benchmark to vet and verify the quality of the background screeners.

Advice: When choosing a background-screening provider or renewing your current one, look for NAPBS certification ([www.napbs.com](http://www.napbs.com)). Then, ask potential screening providers about their accuracy, specifically their error rate and resolution rate. It’s information they don’t always give out, but it’s important criteria to judge diligence, compliance, and abilities concerning the background reports they provide.

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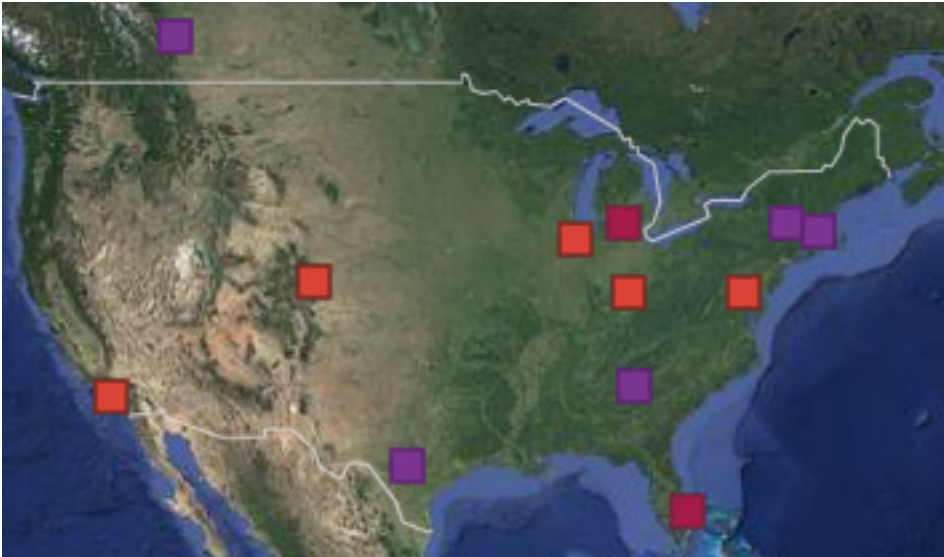
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## ANCA Regional Meetings

In an effort to connect our members regionally, ANCA is now offering peer-to-peer opportunities for professional development in several regions across the country. Click on the adjacent map to see if there's a meeting near you!

## Peer Consults - We know the business. We're in it too!

ANCA offers consulting assistance to nature centers and other environmental education organizations at very reasonable rates.

The cost includes transportation, lodging, and meals for the team, plus a \$3,250 fee that goes toward supporting ANCA's professional services. 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 facilities and trails
- Program evaluation
- Personnel & human resources issues
- Fundraising and fiscal management
- Green building
- Exhibits
- Starting a center
- Organizational structure

### Join the Team!

ANCA's Consult Services are a success because of it's members' participation on Consult Teams. Please consider sharing your experiences and lessons learned.

Consult Team members donate their time but all expenses are paid. Participating in a Consult is a great way to see other parts of the country, learn about other nature centers, and take home valuable knowledge for your own center.

So don't delay!!!

PLEASE fill out the skills survey in the Member's Section on ANCA's website at [www.natctr.org](http://www.natctr.org).

To find out more about ANCA's Peer Consults contact:

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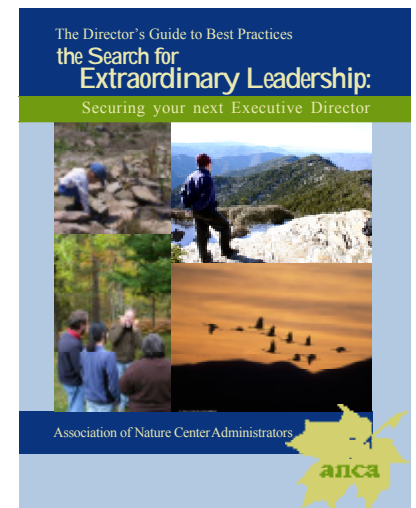
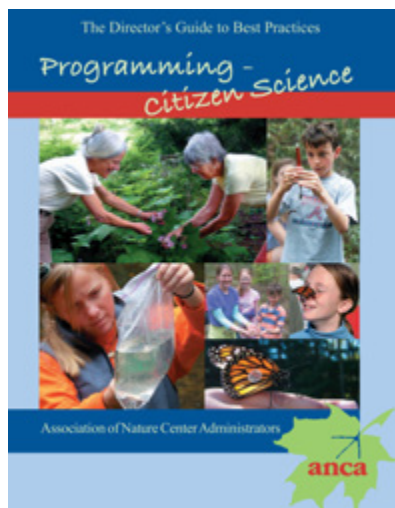
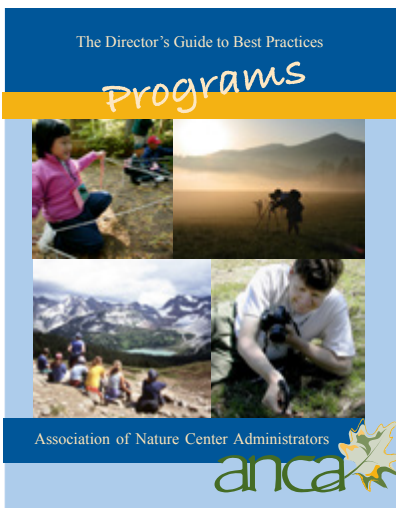
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