

directions

Journal of the Association of Nature Center Administrators

Ken Finch Receives ANCA's 2017 Nature Center Leadership Award!

It isn't just that Ken has had good ideas that have been ahead of their time. It's that his ability to advance those ideas, through his compelling speeches and his powerful writing, have been unparalleled in our profession."

David T. Catlin, Principal David Catlin Consulting LLC.

Tina Popson
Asst. Director Student Engagement
Creighton University
Omaha, NE

Ken Finch has been recognized as the recipient of the 2017 ANCA Nature Center Leadership Award for his visionary environmental education philosophy and his work towards the professionalization of the nature and environmental learning center field. Over a 43-year career, Ken pursued his passion relentlessly, promoting nature pre-schools and the idea of love for nature as the gateway to nature education. Gordon Maupin, retired executive director of the Wilderness Center, writes, "Ken Finch championed the paradigm shift that children fall in love with



Ken Finch

nature first (through frequent, undirected, positive contact with nature) and only then are they inspired to learn about nature and ultimately work to protect the natural world." As the President of the Association of Nature Center Administrators from 1995-1997, Ken paved the way for critical early growth of the field, emphasizing the "importance of professionalizing our roles as leaders in our communities" Charity Krueger,

retired executive director of the Aullwood Audubon Center & Farm, writes. The nature and environmental learning center profession is indebted to Ken's vision, passion and dedication to environmental education.

After earning a master's degree in environmental

(continued on page 4)

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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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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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Director's Notes

Eventful Spring!

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

This May marked my ten-year anniversary as the executive director of ANCA. I want to thank the ANCA membership for the work you do - it is such a privilege working for such a fantastic community.

As we are knee-deep in the planning of my 11th ANCA Summit as director, it is nice to take a break and reflect back on everything we have accomplished in ten years. And I say 'we' because ANCA is an organization that has always benefitted from a hard-working board of directors. In fact, the board operated without a staff from 1989 until 1995 when they contracted with the Aullwood Audubon Center & Farm in Ohio to host the office and provide staff support for membership management. I was hired in 2007 and my first task was to move the ANCA office from Aullwood to Utah. I will never forget the overwhelming feeling of responsibility when the moving truck pulled up to my office and unloaded 60+ boxes of ANCA history. Luckily I was not alone. I hired Ann Rilling as our marketing and communications director and she served in that role until her recent retirement.

In ten years, thanks to a strong culture of strategic planning, a dedicated board, and a professional staff, we have many accomplishments to be proud of. To list a few:



- We immediately added content and resources to the website to make it a better member resource including a job board, sample documents and resources, and examples and stories of best practices from the field.
- ANCA has a staff that is readily available to our members and anyone (member or not!) who contacts the office looking for assistance. The ANCA staff now includes myself, a full-time marketing and development assistant, a part-time office and membership assistant, and Ann is staying involved as our communications specialist to assist with the newsletter and special projects.
- The ANCA membership grew from just over 400 members to almost 630 and it includes members in China, Japan, Canada, and Mexico. We also added a category of membership for both our emeritus and emerging leaders.
- The Richard Haley Memorial Scholarship Fund, an endowed fund established to support Summit Scholarships, has grown from \$25,000 to \$48,000. The ANCA Endowment grew from \$112,000

(continued on page 3)

to \$225,000, and we established the ANCA Operational Reserve in 2010.

- The ANCA Annual Fund was established in support of our operations.

- We now offer peer-to-peer learning and networking opportunities throughout the year with nine ANCA Regions that meet at least annually and 65 active pairs of mentees and mentors in the ANCA Mentor Program.

- Embracing best practices, we established policies in human resources, financial management, fund development, and we adopted an emergency succession plan. We are currently developing a diversity, equity, and inclusion statement.

- Wait! We're not done... We are about to embark on a new strategic planning process and a complete overhaul of the ANCA website. Stay tuned!

When I was hired ten years ago, Tim Sandsmark was the President of the Board of ANCA and was about to end a seven-year board tenure. He re-joined the board in 2011 and after serving two more terms, he rotates off the board once again.

Tim is one of the first people I met in ANCA in 1998 when I attended my first Summit in Tennessee, and we both had worked, at different times, at the same center in Colorado. Tim was also Ann's introduction to ANCA when he encouraged her to attend her first Summit at the Rio Grande Nature Center in New Mexico in 1999. Tim spoke the words, "I found my people," when he attended the very first ANCA Summit in 1995 at Treehaven in Wisconsin. I have heard countless ANCA members

repeat that sentiment when they join our network and meet people like Tim.

Tim is rotating off of the board July 1 but he is not leaving ANCA! I hope you will join me in thanking him for service to our profession above and beyond!



Tim Sandsmark - once a treehugger, always a treehugger

Also occurring on July 1, Brooks Paternotte, executive director of the Irvine Nature Center in Maryland, will be joining the board. Brooks has been the director of his nature center for four years; prior to that he was a classroom teacher and middle school principal in Baltimore. He is an experienced fund-raiser and has served on the ANCA Development Committee for the past two years and on two ANCA Peer Consult teams. Brooks stated, "Had it not been for ANCA, I would never have found success in this position nor grown professionally through peer consults and Summits. When the opportunity to give back to the organization presented itself, I jumped at it." We are thrilled to have Brooks on board! 🌿



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education (EE), Ken began his career as the Director of Education at the Children's Museum of Hartford, Connecticut. He worked as the Curator of Natural Science at the Children's Museum of Indianapolis, Indiana before returning to Connecticut to serve as the Director of the New Canaan Nature Center. He went on to be the Director of Glen Helen Nature Preserve in Yellow Springs, Ohio and the Executive Director at Fontenelle Forest Association in Omaha, Nebraska. Ken also served as the Vice President/Executive Director for National Audubon Minnesota and remains adjunct faculty at Antioch University New England.

In 2005, Ken became the founder and president of Green Hearts Institute for Nature in Childhood, a nonprofit conservation organization that focused on nature-based play and how it can be restored to childhood. Pat Welch, retired Executive Director of Pine Jog Environmental Education Center, notes that he "pursued his passion relentlessly by promoting nature pre-schools and the concept of nature centers as playgrounds for unstructured nature play. When Ken formed Green Hearts Institute for Nature in Childhood, he was among the earliest professionals to embrace these approaches and was a pioneer in giving these concepts life and moving them into the mainstream."

In addition to providing vision and leadership to the nature centers he led, he simultaneously committed the time to consult with 23 other nature centers as part

of ANCA Peer Consult teams, a number that remains as one of the top two individual's participation rates. One consult team member notes Ken's valuable contributions, describing Ken as being the purveyor of sage wisdom with his ability to quickly key in on critical issues and quickly identify what was most important. Ken also volunteered for ANCA along the way. He served two full terms on the ANCA board, including the role of President, and lead ANCA during its crucial formative years. Gordon Maupin states "Ken not only kept ANCA alive, but marshaled other nature center leaders to foster its critical growth in membership, services, and importance."

Perhaps most notable in all his accomplishments are Ken's intellectual and philosophical contributions to the profession, especially his total passion for promoting groundbreaking environmental education initiatives. Charity Krueger cites his articles and lectures that have inspired dozens of nature centers to develop nature play preschools and notes "in early 2000, Ken developed and led an analysis for a cohort of nature center directors in Ohio regarding the feasibility of developing nature play preschools. As a result of that effort, Aullwood created a nature play preschool at their working farm in collaboration with Head Start. That preschool opened in 2012 and is still the only Head Start program in the country that is situated on a sustainable farm."

In her nomination letter, Marcie Oltman, executive director of the Tamarack Nature Center, who has been Ken's professional colleague for more than thirty years, writes the following, "Working

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in a 21st Century World

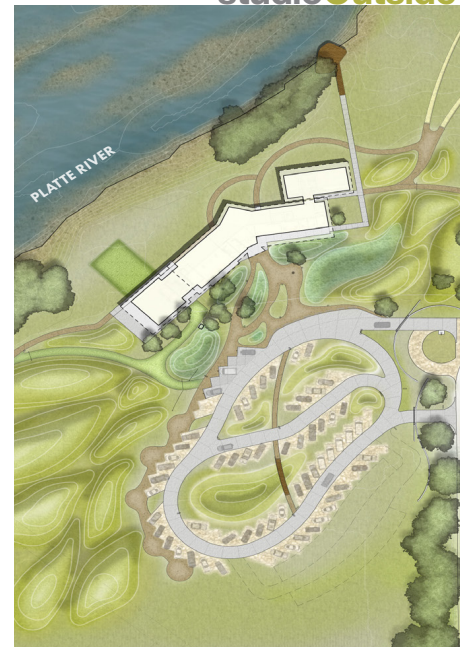


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side by side with Ken is a master class in how to blend philosophy, conviction, knowledge, disruption, strategy, argument, devil's advocacy, and just plain stubbornness, when advocating for positive change." For these reasons and all those above, Ken Finch emulates what it means to be a leader and is a deserving recipient of the 2017 ANCA Nature Center Leadership Award which will be presented on August 24th at the ANCA Summit.

Congratulations Ken! Job, and career, well done!! 🌱

ANCA's 2017 Outstanding New Leader Award

Haley Breniser ~ Executive Director at Grass River Natural Area

"The one quality that impresses me the most is Haley's integrity. She is open, honest, and sincere in her dealings with people. She is respectful of others and shows people that she values their opinions, even when they hold different opinions from hers. Her friendliness and enthusiasm draw people to her and to Grass River Natural Area."

Peg Comfort, Board Chair, Torch Conservation Center

Tina Popson
Asst. Director Student Engagement
Creighton University
Omaha, NE

Praised for her commitment to conservation, people skills, and her ability to focus others on a goal, the Association of Nature Center Administrators recognizes Haley Breniser with the 2017 ANCA Outstanding New Leader Award.

Laurie Stanek, Antrim County Board of Commissioners Member, writes, "I have witnessed first-hand her work ethic and fund-raising capabilities... with her creativity and hard work, Grass River has been able to hire additional staff for conducting educational classes and programs as well as the support staff needed for the day to day activities and office work."

In just three short years as the Executive Director of Grass River Natural Area, Haley has raised over \$80,000 in grants used in part to develop the fundraising capacity of her team and resulting in the generation of over \$200,000 in donations. It is evident that Haley is a force for positive growth for her center and the profession.

Prior to her work at Grass River Natural Area, in Bellaire, Michigan, Haley's professional career includes conducting




Haley Breniser

ornithological research with the PCSU Maui Forest Bird Recover Project in Makawao, Hawaii, serving as the Director of Ecological Services at the Kalamazoo Nature Center in Kalamazoo, Michigan and coordinating aspects of care for birds of prey as a Senior Wildlife Specialist at the High Desert Museum in Bend, Oregon. She is a graduate of Michigan State University and also completed multidisciplinary studies in Pokhara, Nepal. She was hired as the Executive Director of Grass River Natural Area in

November of 2013.

According to Lori Sak, Board Chair of Grass River Natural Area Inc., "Haley is a visionary who has a knack for turning dreams into reality." In 2015 her leadership brought an ANCA Peer Consult to the site, and she used the resulting report to guide her in relationship building with the county. That same year she completed a course on Fundraising Principles and Strategies through North Sky sponsored by the Indiana University School of Philanthropy and two years later completed an elite Beta North Sky Fund Development Cohort Class.

Haley epitomizes professionalism and strives to implement best practices, including improving her professional growth by gaining expertise through her fundraising coursework, attending ANCA Summits, and serving on an ANCA Peer Consult team in Seguin, Texas. 



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ANCA President's Award ~ 2017

Mary Jane Dockeray ~ Blandford Nature Center Founder & Former Director

Caitlin Fader
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Logan, UT

The Association of Nature Center Administrators is honored to distinguish Blandford Nature Center Founder and former Director Mary Jane Dockeray as the inaugural ANCA President's Award recipient for foundational leadership in the nature and environmental learning center profession.

During a nearly 70-year career, Mary Jane has helped instill environmental education for youth as part of the nature and environmental learning center profession. Since boldly asking for the donation of ten acres of private land in 1964 for "getting kids boots on the ground," Mary Jane has displayed what Jason Meyer, current President/CEO of the Blandford Nature Center calls "her characteristic willingness to push boundaries."

Over 43 years, Mary Jane grew those ten acres into a 143-acre refuge that has served more than two million visitors - an astounding accomplishment! Among her innovative achievements is the foundation of the Blandford School, a sixth grade program where 60 public school students spend their entire school year using the nature center as their classroom.

Beyond Blandford, Mary Jane helped build youth environmental education into the ethos of



Mary Jane Dockeray

the profession by freely offering her knowledge. She hosted and supported an early professional association of nature center administrators: the Michigan Coalition of Nature Centers. Corky McReynolds, PhD, CPF, and former Coalition member writes, "Her inspiration to me helped launch my career, and I am just one of literally thousands of lives she has touched."

Mary Jane Dockeray exemplifies the exceptional contribution to the nature and environmental learning center profession that the President's Award was created to acknowledge. ANCA Board President, Francis Velazquez, writes, "It is how Mary Jane's story touches on all the aspects of our profession that captured my attention. It was

the humility, simple directness, foresight, and sustained effort that brought her consideration for the President's Award. It was how she educated one child, through one program, one field trip, one nature center, one pioneering idea after another and how she influenced one community and one profession with such lasting effects that made it clear she should be awarded by ANCA."

Jen Levy, ANCA Executive Director, writes, "Mary Jane represents an exceptional group of individuals who recognized the need to secure the places that are now a vital network of nature education sites. Our profession is indebted to Mary Jane and her fellow nature education pioneers, and I am thrilled the board is recognizing her."

To no surprise, at age 90, Mary Jane continues to live out her commitment to environmental education. You can find her captivating young learners and mentees weekly at the Blandford Nature Center. On behalf of the nature and environmental learning center profession, we recognize Mary Jane Dockeray for her unwavering commitment to youth, nature, and the profession with the ANCA President's Award – rock on Mary Jane!

The ANCA President's Award will be presented to Mary Jane Dockeray this fall in Grand Rapids, Michigan. 🌿

Profile:

Meet Our Summit Hosts ~ Magnolia Summit Aug. 23 ~ 27

It's always nice to be able to see a familiar face when arriving some place new. So to help you get a little acquainted with the hard working people hosting our Summit this August, read on and meet the staff at McDowell Environmental Education Programs!

Whitney Moore Shea is the Camp McDowell interim Executive Director. She began her tenure here as an Instructor at the McDowell Environmental Center, later becoming Guest Services Director, then Assistant Director of Camp McDowell.



Mark Johnston, who recently retired after 26 ½ years as Executive Director, will be a part of the ANCA Summit. He is a priest in the Episcopal Church and a carpenter who loves to build things. Not one to stop working to make the world a better place, Mark is now entering the 2018 race for governor of Alabama.



Maggie Johnston is the Director of McDowell Educational Programs, including the McDowell Environmental Center, Farm School, and Magnolia Nature Pre-school. She taught science and environmental education at Alabama School for the Deaf for 21 years before starting her career at McDowell 13 years ago.



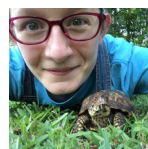
Jen Kopnick is the McDowell Environmental Center Director and Ropes Course Director. She has taught at The Outdoor School in Texas, worked at multiple summer camps across the US, and managed Venture Outdoors' rock climbing non-profit. Jen has been a permanent staff member at McDowell Environmental Center since 2009.



Carrie Evans, the Assistant Director of McDowell Environmental Center, was born and raised in a suburb of Philadelphia called Chester Springs. While in college,



she worked on an organic farm where she was in charge of all educational programs. After college, she dabbled in the sales and financial industries. But she soon realized that she was meant to be in environmental education. Carrie moved to Alabama to become an instructor in 2014.



Kendra Burns, the Animal Program Manager and Outreach Coordinator, is from Florence, Kentucky and discovered her love for raptors and snakes when she started teaching at McDowell in 2011. In 2013 she furthered her experience in environmental education and animal care at Ruffner Mountain Nature Preserve, Alabama 4-H Science School, and an apprenticeship with the US Forest Service at the Woodlands Nature Station.



Trish Smrecak, Education and Curriculum Manager, is originally from a small farming town in Michigan, but has lived in a lot of places across the northeast. She has a B.S. in geology from St. Lawrence University, an M.S. from University of Cincinnati, and a Ph.D. from Michigan State. She is a 2014 thru-hiker of the Appalachian Trail and is finishing up a 100 mile challenge on the North Country Trail.



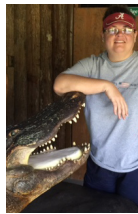
Andrew Shea is the Produce Ambassador (Farmer) at Camp McDowell. After scouring the nether regions of our planet in search of Utopian habitation, Andrew has returned to McDowell. Most recently working as a goodwill ambassador in Haiti, his diverse career path has led him to the understanding that the heart of nurturing change lies in the grumbling belly of us all.

(continued on page 9)

Laura Rodgers is the Program Coordinator for the McDowell Farm School. Laura grew up outside of Ann Arbor, Michigan and attended Michigan State University. She had been bouncing between jobs in agriculture and education until she found the perfect blend of both these interests at the McDowell Farm School!



Stacey Glenn, the on-site Registered Nurse for McDowell, graduated from Wallace State with her registered nursing degree in 2006. She has previous nursing experience in the hospital, nursing home, and home health areas. Now she has the awesome opportunity to work with children here at Camp McDowell.



Brandon Phillips is the Camp Medic. Brandon grew up on the coast of Mississippi. After graduation from the University of South Alabama, he spent the next five summers in Alaska, working at a friend's homestead farm and guiding wilderness trips for young folks at Trailside Discovery Camp in Anchorage. Brandon has worked for Camp McDowell's Environmental Center since 2009, with intermittent travels to the far North. 🌿



Bringing People Together:

Why America's Nature Centers are Needed Now More Than Ever

Chris Brusatte
Interpretive Planner
Taylor Studios, Inc.
Rantoul, IL

We all know the ecological and environmental benefits that nature centers provide. The health and well-being of plants, animals, and other organisms should always be top of mind. We are also well aware of the many benefits to us human beings as individuals – recreation, solace, education, and an opportunity to connect with nature. However, we often forget just how beneficial nature centers are to another important “constituency” – that is, our society as a whole. We are at a time in our country's history when we need to pull together and share common experiences, and nature centers provide unique spaces where Americans of all stripes gather together for shared rest, relaxation, and education.

Our world is not always a calm and placid place. Recent events often remind us of this. Turn on the news and headlines often blare back and forth in a nonstop rhetorical battle. Elections, politicking, and lawmaking are often shrouded in ugliness and divisiveness. Can anything bring us together?

Yes – and our country's nature centers can be part of the solution. In a time of polarization, America's nature centers still bring

everybody together. Venture to your local site and you will see people of all ages, races, ethnicities, and socioeconomic backgrounds smiling together and enjoying the outdoors. Nature centers bring people together to share experiences and to forge relationships. In a world increasingly divided by barriers, bubbles, and differences, America's nature centers foster inclusion and togetherness. Need inspiration? Look no further...

“There is a love of wild nature in everybody.” ~ John Muir



photo courtesy of Taylor Studios Inc

“It embodies that uniquely American idea that each of us has an equal share in the land around us... Today, our open spaces are more precious than ever, and it's more important than ever that we come together to protect them for the next generation.”

~ Barack Obama

“We have the privilege of living in a land of unparalleled beauty. We've got vast mountain ranges and mighty rivers and open plains and spectacular coastlines. These open spaces are the shared heritage of everybody. They just don't belong to a few people – they belong to all of us.”

~ George W. Bush

“One touch of nature makes the whole world kin.”

~ William Shakespeare

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*I hope I'll see you in August
at the 2017 Magnolia Summit!*

*-David Mimeles
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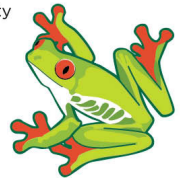
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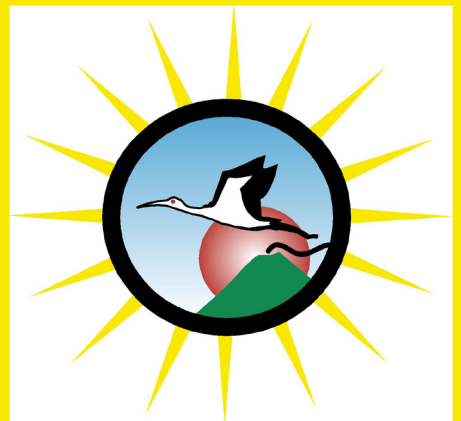
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Nature Play Lessons Learned:

“Early Childhood Action in Nature” at Hudson Highlands Nature Museum

Tina Edel, M.S. Ed
ECAN Project Manager
Hudson Highlands Nature Museum
Cornwall, NY

You don’t have to be a nature center administrator to know that children today spend much less time outdoors than in previous generations: compare your play experiences to those of your children or grandchildren. While you probably spent hours digging in the dirt or climbing trees, youngsters of today are more likely to be shuffled to scheduled activities or playing on electronic devices.

Yet in order for children to take an interest in the environment as they grow, studies show that they need to learn to love nature first. That love starts with exploring woods, climbing trees, and jumping in puddles: interviews of environmentalists have shown that their interest in nature was rooted in the outdoor play in nature they experienced when they were young, often aided by a caring adult such as a parent, grandparent, or educator.

The Hudson Highlands Nature Museum (HHNM) in Cornwall, NY has a long history of working with children and families through environmental education programs, summer camps, and adult/child programs to fulfill its mission to “create responsible caretakers of the environment.” HHNM opened the Hudson Valley’s first nature and science preschool program in 1994, and opened the region’s first nature play area, Grasshopper Grove, in 2013.

Using the resources of the museum, preschool, and nature play area, HHNM developed a two-

year project with the specific goal of promoting nature play. Entitled Early Childhood Action in Nature, or ECAN, the project was funded in 2015 by the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS). ECAN aimed to reach educators of children ages 4-7 in two ways: through teacher education in the form of nature play workshops and a direct nature play experience



Climbing log at Grasshopper Grove, Hudson Highlands Nature Museum

facilitated by nature play guides in Grasshopper Grove. Parents and caregivers of young children were reached through public nature play event programming at Grasshopper Grove and through take home literature. The hypothesis behind ECAN is that if children spend more time outside playing, they are more likely to become responsible caretakers of the environment as adults.

The goal of the ECAN project was to use play programs and workshops to develop in adults an appreciation of how nature play makes children happier, healthier, smarter, and more likely to care for the environment, thereby shifting the attitudes and behaviors of the adults who care for young children, so that they will in turn encourage those youngsters to spend more time outdoors -- for

longer periods.

For the public, HHNM offered monthly themed programs, which took place during a specific time period during Grasshopper Grove’s weekend public hours. A few examples of programming? A celebration of International Mud Day complete with mud pits, a mud kitchen, and painting with mud (along with a cleanup station to hose down participants); a nature art program that involved weaving long leaves and plant stems to create a hideout teepee in Grasshopper Grove; and a Fairy House event where families built tiny homes from found natural materials (based on the Tracy Kane book *Fairy Houses*). Also, seasonal scavenger hunts were held so that children could discover flora and fauna common to areas of HHNM within Grasshopper Grove as well as on the nearby hiking trails and at a pond on museum property.

Each program was designed to:

- Be “self-service” – Children could come to a station and use the materials with little instruction from the adults. HHNM play facilitators, known as “Play Rangers,” provided an introduction, answered questions, and made sure that materials were available and ready for the play to take place at any time during the play event hours. The adults helped, but did not lead play activities.
- Be open-ended – Nature is inherently flexible, but any human-made additions such as art materials or tools used in the play events were intentionally chosen

(continued on page 13)

so that children of different ages could use them in multiple ways - to play and create from their own imaginations. For example, the outdoor art program had no adult sample projects.

- Provide 'take-away' info for the adults – This provided an educational component for families on the benefits and value of nature play as well as resources to continue or extend outdoor play with their children at home. Examples of the take-home sheets included: recipes for dirt play dough, information on Fairy Houses, and some background on International Mud Day.

- Be replicated at home – A key goal of the ECAN project was to promote nature play so that children will play outside in nature more regularly, encouraged by adults who understand the many ways that it benefits child development and how it promotes conservation behaviors. Each activity was simple, free or inexpensive, and easily done in a home backyard, a park, or any natural environment.

Results/Lessons Learned from ECAN:

The grant required HHNM to bring in external evaluators to determine if ECAN was having the desired effect. The evaluation firm PEER Associates developed survey and analysis tools for participating educators and public visitors to Grasshopper Grove. PEER's analysis showed a dramatic shift in the attitudes of educators and parents after participating in ECAN, and an increase in the frequency of nature play. In other words, adults at home and school understood the value of nature play and were supporting children in more outdoor play, for longer

periods. One parent wrote in their survey, "[I'm] forever grateful to HHNM for bringing us closer to nature and each other, and teaching our children how to be good stewards of the earth."

Average daily public attendance at Grasshopper Grove Nature Play area increased 24.6% from 2015 to 2016, fueled by the nature play events. The themed events were promoted on the HHNM website, local print media, HHNM social media, as well as local parenting sites such as Hudson Valley Parent. The events and their promotion also resulted in an increase in new, non-member visitors to Grasshopper Grove. (Admission for museum members is free; non-members pay a daily admission fee for adults and children age



Celebrating International Mud Day at Hudson Highlands Nature Museum

2 and older.) After families had visited HHNM for a Grasshopper Grove event, they often returned for subsequent play events, general nature play time in Grasshopper Grove, a weekend education program, or to view the museum's collection of local wildlife at its Wildlife Education Center. Multiple visits led to increased membership.

The families who discovered

Hudson Highlands Nature Museum through the nature play events also expressed interest in other HHNM programming such as scout programs and the Young Naturalist Preschool Program - fostering an ongoing connection to HHNM that has the potential to grow and develop.

What Can Nature Centers Do to Promote Nature Play?

Suggestions for Success:

If your center would like to bring young families to your site through nature play events, a nature play area is useful but not necessarily required. Though Grasshopper Grove provides an inviting and flexible resource for HHNM, nature centers anywhere can provide play events using the spaces available at their own sites such as:

- Nature trails can provide spaces for Fairy House events, or for scavenger hunts (where plants and animals are discovered and observed only!)
- Open spaces allow room for mud events, art events using natural materials, or any play where the materials can be transported in.
- Involve an educator familiar with early childhood development in the planning and execution of the events, so that the materials and themes are appropriate for children under the age of 7 (who act and play differently from older kids).
- Connect with local parenting sites through social media to promote nature play events.

Leveraging Connections to Schools: Home-School Connection

The ECAN project's educator program connected HHNM with over 100 area early childhood educators, primarily prekindergarten

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garten and kindergarten teachers. After they attended a nature play workshop at HHNM, educators brought their students to Grasshopper Grove for a class visit for nature play. During the visits, teachers saw their students engage in nature play. The teachers then expressed through follow-up questionnaires that their observations helped them realize the value of nature play for their students. Their ECAN experiences encouraged the educators to bring their students outside for longer periods, to add nature play elements such as tree cookies (slices of tree branches or trunks), or rocks to their play areas.

In turn, the participating educators were given nature play pamphlets for the families of their students to extend the nature play message. The pamphlets included simple nature play information, suggestions, and a free admission coupon for the family to return to HHNM for one visit.

Through the educator and public programs provided by the ECAN project, HHNM has been

able to reach more young families. As parents and teachers see their children playing outdoors and enjoying nature, the results of ECAN have shown that they are more likely to both return to HHNM and to send their children outdoors for




Painting with Water at Hudson Highlands Nature Museum

more old-fashioned, child-led play.

The Hudson Highlands Nature Museum is a center for nature in Cornwall, NY. The Mission of the

Museum is to create responsible caretakers of the environment. Through quality educational programs for the public that focus on the unique ecology of the Hudson Valley, the Museum promotes knowledge and appreciation of the natural world and the dynamic role of human interaction in its well-being. For resources and information about nature play including a copy of the ECAN evaluation, go to hnm.org and click on "Nature Play."

The ECAN project was made possible in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services grant # MA-10-14-0190-14. The IMLS is the primary source of federal support for the nation's 123,000 libraries and 35,000 museums. Their mission is to inspire libraries and museums (and nature centers) to advance innovation, lifelong learning, and cultural and civic engagement. Their grant making, policy development, and research help libraries and museums deliver valuable services that make it possible for communities and individuals to thrive. To learn more, visit www.ims.gov. 



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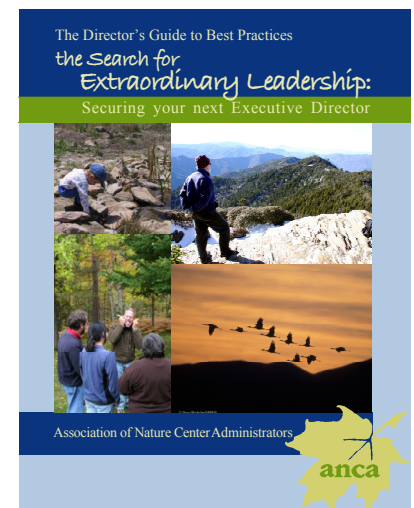
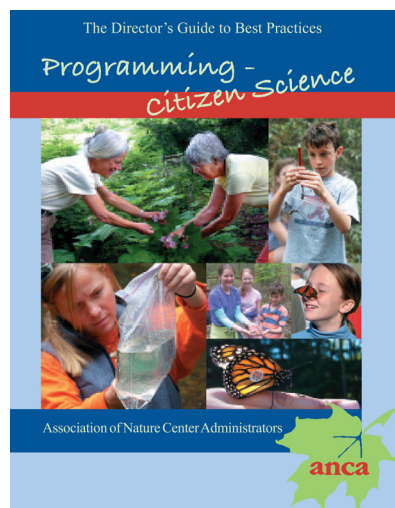
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