

Directions

Journal of the Association of Nature Center Administrators // Fall 2022

ANCA *Leadership Awards*

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

INCLUSIVE
PROGRAMS

FORUM
HIGHLIGHTS

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The *Directions* journal contains news and trends in the nature & environmental learning center profession, as well as relevant resources and stories of innovative leadership. ANCA members receive each *Directions* by email and can always see back-issues via the member portal on the ANCA website.

If you are part of the nature center profession and wish to receive *Directions*, see [ANCA membership levels](#).

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Cover photo: Autumnal scenery at Chippewa Nature Center in Midland, Mich.

About ANCA

Founded in 1989, the Association of Nature Center Administrators is a private nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting and supporting best leadership and management practices for nature and environmental learning centers. Serving more than 700 members, ANCA is the leader in the profession.

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Director's Notes: Finding Joy and Gratitude for the ANCA Community



Reflecting on the 2022 ANCA Summit and introducing updates to the ANCA Board of Directors.



Jen Levy

ANCA Executive Director

One of the hardest things from the past two and a half years is the lost opportunities to be together with friends, family, and colleagues. The ANCA staff work remotely and especially look forward to our in-person meetings and events.

We were incredibly disappointed when we could not be together in 2020 and 2021 for our Summits and other meetings. They are hard work but the reward is spending time with our members who truly inspire us and remind us of our shared work connecting people to nature. When we came back together this past August for the Thrive Outside Summit at the Irvine Nature Center in Md., it was especially joyful. I will admit to feeling a little anxious at first but as soon as we were back together I felt happiness and gratitude to be in-person with members of our community!

I am grateful for our amazing hosts at Irvine, especially Executive Director Brooks Paternotte and Deputy Director Courtney Sagal, who did the hard work of hosting their peers and creating a safe space for living and learning together. I am also grateful for the financial and programmatic support of our [amazing sponsors](#) and donors. Without their help, the event would not have

Photo above: Jen Levy speaks on August 1 as part of the 2022 ANCA Summit at Irvine Nature Center in Owings Mills, Md.

Director's Notes (cont.)

been possible. These businesses and individuals truly care about our profession and our members.

I am grateful for the ANCA Staff — Asa Duffee, Dan Auer, and Meg Murdock. All three contribute their skills and talents to ANCA and share a strong passion for the work of our members. Although we work remotely, we are a strong team, and we stay connected thanks to their dedication ... and amazing virtual tools. We have come a long way since conference calls and mailing zip drives!

I feel very lucky to work with the ANCA Board who, despite the challenges of navigating their own organizations through the pandemic, remained steadfast supporters of ANCA, our mission, and our staff. ANCA Board Members serve three-year terms and after two terms, they rotate off the board. At the end of June, four of our members rotated off the board — Mary McKinley, Jason Meyer, Vera Roberts, and Jenn Wright. Each of these individuals made huge contributions to ANCA, and I am very happy to report that all four will remain active on committees.

We welcomed three new board members on July 1. Kay Carlson, who is returning to the board after two years, has served as President and CEO of the Nature Center at Shaker Lakes, located in Shaker Heights, Ohio, since June 2008. Kay serves on the ANCA Development and Governance Committees.

Dennis Pilaske is the Executive Director of Chipewewa Nature Center in Midland, Mich., and has been on staff since 1997. At the Summit in August, Dennis received the 2022 ANCA Nature Center Leadership Award. Dennis serves on the ANCA CONNECTS

Committee and in November will be hosting our first in-person ANCA Peer CONNECTS meeting since the pandemic started.

Ann Wasser has the unique opportunity to be both the Director of Severson Dells Nature Center and the Director of Education for the Forest Preserves of Winnebago County in Rockford, Ill. In August of 2019, Ann received the ANCA Outstanding New Leader Award. Ann serves on the Peer Consult Committee and will Chair the Leadership Awards Committee next year.

I am looking forward to working with Kay, Dennis, and Ann. All three were chosen to serve on the board because of the contributions they have made to ANCA Committees, the Mentor Program, and on Peer Consult Teams. Would you like to become more involved in ANCA? In August we launched a new opportunity for ANCA members interested in serving on the board or a committee of the board, and I invite you to submit your interest. We welcome experienced leaders as well as candidates who are looking to add committee and board experience to their leadership development. [Learn more here.](#)

Although the pandemic is not over and COVID continues to pose challenges for in-person opportunities, I am looking forward to the year ahead and being together with ANCA peers. The need to be together, in-person, played a pivotal role in the formation of ANCA, and we will continue to connect our members and provide opportunities for networking, support, and friendship. 🌱

“

I recently celebrated my 14-year anniversary as President & CEO for the Nature Center at Shaker Lakes, and I never would have made it this long without the amazing learning experiences and support I have received through involvement with ANCA. I have been extremely impressed by the caliber of people working for nature centers across the U.S. (and now globally!), and have learned so much from my nature center colleagues over the past 14 years, which is why I joined the Board in 2014. I believe that the reason there are so many good leaders working for nature centers is largely due to the targeted professional development provided by ANCA. It is critical to have the national support of a network of seasoned nature center administrators in order to move all nature centers forward.



Kay Carlson

President & CEO at
Nature Center at Shaker Lakes,
ANCA Board Member



Pilaske Recognized with Premier ANCA Award

For 25 years, Dennis Pilaske has contributed to Chippewa Nature Center's success. In August he was presented with the 2022 ANCA Nature Center Leadership Award as part of the ANCA Summit.

by Asa Duffee, ANCA Director of Marketing & Communications

In 2016, Dennis Pilaske had worked at [Chippewa Nature Center \(CNC\)](#) in Midland, Mich., for nearly 20 years. At the time he worked as Director of Interpretation, having initially started as Curator of Collections and Exhibits in 1997. Pilaske was comfortable in programs, leading educational experiences outside through hikes, kayaking, and music. "I felt like that was my niche," he says.

Dick Touvell had announced his own retirement as CNC Executive Director after 26 years in that position, so the organization was searching for new leadership. Initially Pilaske was uninterested in the role, since he felt best suited for programs. After encouragement from his peers, however, Pilaske reconsidered.

"I realized that over the years I'd been given some

great opportunities to build connections into the community and had a lightbulb moment," Pilaske says, thinking "I actually think I could do this ... and bring a lot to the position."

After completing a national search process, the CNC Board of Directors agreed with Pilaske's revelation, and Pilaske began as CNC Executive Director on Jan-

ABOUT THE AWARD

The ANCA Nature Center Leadership Award recognizes an individual who in their role at the highest administrative level of an organization has made a major contribution to the success of a nature center, as well as important contributions to the profession through professional organizations and the support of other nature center leaders. ANCA has presented this award to one individual each year since 2000.

Pilaske Recognized with Award (cont.)

uary 1, 2017.

In fact, the broader nature center community has recognized that Pilaske indeed brings much to the position of executive director. As such for his contributions to CNC and the nature center profession, Pilaske earned the 2022 ANCA Nature Center Leadership Award — the premier award within the field. ANCA presented Pilaske with the award on August 3 as part of the 2022 ANCA Summit at [Irvine Nature Center](#) in Owings Mills, Md.

LEADERSHIP THROUGH CRISES AND GROWTH

Pilaske's tenure has had its share of challenges. In June 2017, heavy rains damaged CNC's Nature Study Building through flooding. Of course the early stages of the pandemic were a monumental challenge for any nonprofit executive director, but this was compounded by a local dam's failure in May 2020, which caused further flooding damage to CNC's trails and buildings.

Throughout these challenges, however, Pilaske spearheaded two strategic plans and a master planning process, facilitated CNC's acquisition of 272 acres, and promoted CNC's role in the Central Michigan Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area. As a result the organization is better suited for mission-focused growth, has enhanced relationships with school districts, and will expand its nature-based programming.

While such logistical accomplishments are impressive, Pilaske says that of all his work at Chippewa Nature Center, he's most proud of his part in creating a healthy work environment for CNC staff — which he also acknowledges is an ongoing group effort. Pilaske notes that earlier this year he



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had to unexpectedly take time away from work, and during that time the CNC staff stepped up and ensured the organization ran smoothly in his absence. To him this was proof that the organizational culture is strong, and that it goes beyond any one person to ensure organizational success.

LEADERSHIP AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Having now worked at Chippewa Nature Center for over 25 years, Pilaske has been able to develop leadership skills throughout a variety of roles. While some may see stark differences between working in programs and working in executive administration, Pilaske actually attributes many of his leadership skills to having worked in environmental education.

In fact, early on in his executive director role, he discovered that he only needed a shift in perspective. For meetings with CNC supporters and members, he says, "I just had to reframe them as programs. There was still a goal, an objective, it was still about building a relationship ... but it had a different ask."

As for recommendations for current environmental education practitioners who are interested in leadership, Pilaske advises to lean into the communication skills that are essential to programs. Not only can

those skills work for education, but also they help with facilitating meetings and listening to staff.

Noting that leadership roles within the nature center field can lead to burnout, Pilaske also emphasizes the need for maintaining boundaries between one's professional and personal life, and to cultivate an identity that isn't "Dennis the Nature Center Director." In his case, Pilaske uses music, biking, cooking, and time with family to maintain a healthy identity outside of work.

25 YEARS, OR JUST GETTING STARTED?

Though he's been with the nature center for 25 years, Pilaske isn't done yet. With CNC currently wrapping up a master planning process, the organization is looking forward to a new stage of connecting people with nature.

Pilaske is also broadening his involvement with the nature center field as a whole. Having been active with ANCA since 2008, he joined the ANCA Board of Directors in July, and in that role will help support organizational leadership and strategic governance.

"It's a really exciting time in the world of nature centers," Pilaske says. "People are seeking nature. They see it as a place to be restored and a place to learn."

A Note from Dennis Pilaske

I remain grateful that I've been able to find a career as fulfilling as what I've experienced working at Chippewa Nature Center. My personal growth has been fueled by caring mentors and a dedicated, knowledgeable team who inspire me with their commitment to connecting all people to nature. Through the years I've continually been impressed with the way nature centers evolve to serve their community though fostering first-time visits as well as sustaining our most seasoned guests. Looking to the future, I'm excited to see how our industry will come together to broaden the voices at the table, and contribute to diverse, equitable, and inclusive communities, connected to nature.

In August I had the good fortune to spend a week in Maryland with my peers from ANCA at Irvine Nature Center for the Annual

Summit. This was the first time in three years that my colleagues and I were able to get together in person due to the pandemic. It became clear in only a few hours of conversation that nature centers across the country successfully served as powerful refuges for the residents of their communities. The stories shared were similar, no matter where the center was located; nature took people to solitude, to adventure, to learning, to inspiration, and more. This is an exciting time in our industry, and I'm so pleased to be learning from peers who truly care and, as a result, are making a difference at home and across the country. ANCA has broadened my perspective, helped me continue to grow, and offered an opportunity to share my own experiences. I would encourage everyone to grow their involvement with this incredible organization.

Below: Dennis Pilaske performing at the CNC Maple Music Matinee on March 21, 2021.



Previous Recipients of the ANCA Nature Center Leadership Award

2021	Drew Dumsch	The Ecology School
2020	Andrea Timpone	Elachee Nature Science Center
2019	Ken Voorhis	Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont, Yellowstone Forever
2018	Bo Glover	Environmental Nature Center
2017	Ken Finch	Environmental Education Consultant
2016	Dick Touvell	Chippewa Nature Center
2015	Dede Long	Briar Bush Nature Center
2014	Carolyn Chipman-Evans	Cibolo Center for Conservation
2013	Saul Weisberg	North Cascades Institute
2012	Sandy Bivens	Warner Park Nature Center
2011	Bob Mercer	Silver Lake Nature Center
2010	Bill Rose	Kalamazoo Nature Center
2009	Pat Welch	Pine Jog Environmental Education Center
2008	Jack Shea	Teton Science Schools
2007	Rich Patterson	Indian Creek Nature Center
2006	Gordon Maupin	The Wilderness Center
2005	Tracy Kay	Schuykill Center for Environmental Education
2004	Dr. Corky McReynolds	Treehaven Environmental Learning Center
2003	Charity Krueger	Aullwood Audubon Center and Farm
2002	Mike Riska	Delaware Nature Society
2001	Dr. Robert Thomas	Loyola University Center for Environmental Communications
2000	H. Lewis Batts	Kalamazoo Nature Center

Minnick Guides Louisville Nature Center to Sustainable Growth, Earning ANCA Award

For her accomplishments, Rebecca Minnick has earned the 2022 ANCA Outstanding New Leader Award.



by Asa Duffee, ANCA Director of Marketing & Communications

Rebecca Minnick’s first professional job after college was working as an educator for The Environmental Schools in Ocean Park, Maine, which hosted multi-day, overnight educational experiences for students. While work at such an outdoor school can involve long hours due to the nature of the programs, this did not deter Minnick from the job.

“I’d go to bed at night and my face would hurt from smiling all day.” she says. This made her speculate at the time, “I think this is my career.”

Minnick is proving herself true in that regard. While she went on to work in a variety of roles in both for-

mal and informal education, in February 2018 Minnick began as the executive director for **Louisville Nature Center** (LNC) in Louisville, Ky. She has since led LNC in renewed growth and major organizational accomplishments.

For her leadership and professionalism that she has brought to the organization, Minnick earned the 2022 ANCA Outstanding New Leader Award, one of two awards that ANCA gives each year. ANCA presented Minnick with the award on August 3 as part of the 2022 ANCA Summit at **Irvine Nature Center** in Owings Mills, Md.

“It was a smart move for LNC to hire Rebecca,” wrote

Minnick Guides LNC, Earns Award (cont.)

Tavia Cathcart Brown, Executive Director of **Creasey Mahan Nature Preserve** in Goshen, Ky., in support of Minnick’s award nomination. “It was clear from the beginning that Rebecca created an inquisitive, positive, and creative environment. She and her staff are intelligent, curious, engaged, and professional in everything they do. Rebecca’s enthusiasm for her work is obvious!”

That enthusiasm has translated into significant changes at LNC. Since Minnick began her tenure, the organization has **grown its membership**, filled its summer camps, implemented a Nature Play Area, and started the Swallowtail Forest School, an outdoor preschool for children ages 3-5. Perhaps most importantly on the business side, however, Minnick has guided the organization to financial stability. When she joined the organization, LNC operated on a near month-to-month fiscal basis, whereas now the nature center has built its reserves and can invest in long-term prospects.

While of course no one person is single-handedly responsible for all these changes, Minnick has clearly been a major influence on these positive changes and more.

TURNING CRISIS INTO OPPORTUNITY

One concrete example of Minnick’s leadership is the development of Swallowtail Forest School, which LNC opened in September 2020. Since Minnick began at LNC, staff had conversations of someday starting a forest school — but it remained a general idea for the future.

As with all nature centers, the beginning of the pandemic was a major disruption to LNC’s operations. However, once the initial shutdown passed, one of the LNC staff made the point: “Maybe this is the time to start a forest school.” After all, the outdoors was the safest environment with respect to COVID, and parents were direly seeking support for their children.

With organizational buy-in, LNC staff had a quick turnaround time to get the forest school off the ground (so to speak). Two staff did an online intensive training, and the organization made connections with established nature-based preschools to draw inspiration.

Importantly, under Minnick’s guidance, LNC consciously started small and planned to grow incrementally. As a small nonprofit, Minnick says, “It’s so much easier to grow slowly than to bite off more than you can chew and cut back.”

As such the preschool started with ten students only in the mornings. As they evaluated and found the initial program successful, the forest school expanded to include afternoons. Currently the preschool hosts

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ABOUT THE AWARD

The **ANCA Outstanding New Leader Award** recognizes an individual with the potential for future impact within the field of nature center administrators. Award recipients demonstrate leadership, professionalism, professional development, and creativity within the field of nature and environmental learning center, while holding less than five years of full-time work experience as the director, executive director, or leader at the highest administrative level at an organization. This award began in 2014.



Previous recipients of the ANCA Outstanding New Leader Award

2021	Mark McKnight	Reflection Riding Arboretum & Nature Center
2020	Merica Whitehall	Fontenelle Forest
2019	Ann Wasser	Severson Dells Nature Center
2018	Chad Truxall	Marine Discovery Center
2017	Haley Breniser	Grass River Natural Area
2016	John Myers	Indian Creek Nature Center
2015	John DeFillipo	John Bunker Sands Wetland Center
2014	Jason Meyer	Fenner Conservancy



Minnick Guides LNC, Earns Award (cont.)

fifteen students in the morning and ten students in the afternoon. The organization may choose to increase to fifteen students for the full day, but only after first evaluating the success of the incremental class size growth.

That growth was also set within the larger LNC mission — “to be a catalyst for conservation through environmental education and connection to nature for every person.” Minnick didn’t want growth just for growth’s sake.

“I didn’t want to get to a place where we were losing sight of quality and losing sight of our mission just to bring in money and bring in kids,” she says.

This process reflects Minnick’s leadership style. For starters, it was a team effort; Minnick worked to give LNC staff the tools they needed to get the work done, while still guiding the process and communicating between stakeholders. The project was also realistic and intentional — with the incremental growth, the staff and board were able to assess how they could improve. Lastly, Minnick ensured that the preschool remained within the organizational mission. All such qualities demonstrate Minnick’s merit in earning the Outstanding New Leader Award.

UTILIZING A GROWTH MINDSET

Having been with Louisville Nature Center for five years now, Minnick may still have a long future in the nature and environmental learning center field. She approaches this future with humility, noting that the road to success is never perfect, and that she and others will make mistakes at times in this work. However, with those mistakes can come growth.

“I try to remind myself that even times I’ve failed have made me a better leader now,” she says.

Such a growth mindset signals a healthy future for both Minnick and LNC. 🌱



A Note from Rebecca Minnick

Before I began working at the Louisville Nature Center, I heard more than a few times phrases along the lines of, “Oh, we’re just a rinky-dink little nature center.” I knew that LNC had not been thriving, and I also saw its untapped potential. While I knew that this was absolutely the job for me, these phrases started to creep into my subconscious and make me wonder if it really mattered that nature centers existed to people beyond us “nature nerds.”

Several things over the past five years have convinced me that we so much more than “matter,” that we are integral to the community and the environmental movement. The pandemic has shown our communities how essential accessible greenspace is not just for leisure and exercise, but also for solace, connection, and mental health. ANCA has shared resources showing how nature centers are a fundamental piece in the work to stop or slow climate change and promote conservation. Many of us are seeing the demand for native plants and trees far outpace supply: what better example that our conservation message is reaching people?

Our work, of course, is convincing others that nature centers are indispensable. So many of you are doing this marvelously. It is so inspiring to connect with ANCA peers and see the incredible work you all are doing. I am so grateful to have found ANCA, as it has been an unmatched resource for learning and support. Thank you all, for doing this hard and imperative work. The future looks bright!

Above: Children exploring a log during a program at Louisville Nature Center.

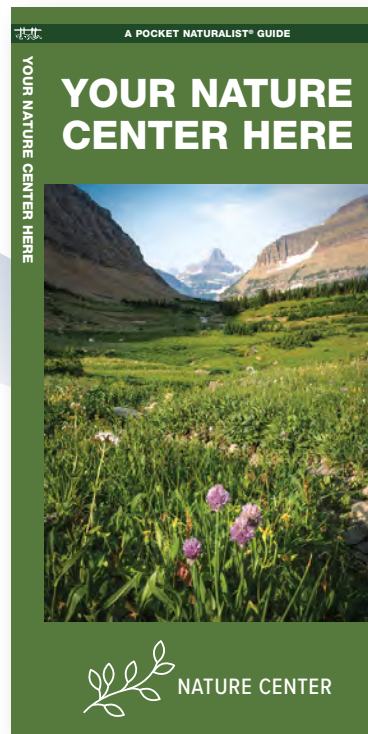


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Developing Inclusive Programs at Elachee Nature Science Center

This year Elachee implemented two new initiatives: scholarships for camp, and a series of programs for underserved communities. Here's how we succeeded.

Sam Fricks, Programs & Events Manager, Elachee Nature Science Center

Kristin Love, Director of Natural Resources and Conservation, Elachee Nature Science Center



Campers engaged in Elachee's Stream Life program with local college professor.

ELACHEE NATURE SCIENCE CENTER'S MISSION IS TO PROMOTE ENVIRONMENTAL UNDERSTANDING THROUGH EDUCATION AND CONSERVATION. Of course, we know that our mission is only achievable when we see a wide variety of faces and families enjoying the physical, mental, emotional, and social benefits of learning and engaging in the outdoors.

Therefore, like many others in our field, we have been working hard to develop experiences that are more inclusive for our entire community. Located in Gainesville, Ga., Elachee is fortunate to be squarely situated in an area rich with diversity. However, the demographics of our public visitors and camp participants do not always reflect our community. As such Elachee has intentionally sought out funding mechanisms to help us ensure that we are providing opportunities for all.

SCHOLARSHIPS ENABLED NEW CAMPERS

During the Summer of 2021, we piloted a program that used scholarships to increase accessibility to our camp for students from one of our local elementary schools. In 2022 we were thrilled to be the recipient of the **Building Opportunities in Out-of-School Time (BOOST) grants program**, a three-year grant administered through the Georgia Statewide Afterschool Network, to support us in furthering these efforts. The goal of the BOOST grant is to address learning loss for those most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and because Hall County was an area of Georgia with a disproportionate pandemic impact, Elachee was honored to be able to bring this to our community.

Inclusive Programs at Elachee (cont.)

Using what we learned from the summer of 2021, for Camp Elachee 2022 we developed a plan to provide scholarships to students from local schools. Along with providing scholarships, we were able to provide transportation, meals and snacks, language interpretation, and support for students with disabilities.

We found that one of the keys to success was having strong partnerships with our local school systems. Working with local schools and their counselors to identify students who would benefit from spending time with us resulted in service to over 200 students through our BOOST camp program. Not only did the schools help identify campers, but their counselors were instrumental in obtaining registration paperwork. Elachee was able to host a family night at one of the schools so that we could further explain what would be provided and answer questions that parents might have.

Transportation was another service made possible through Elachee's relationships with local school systems. Many campers rode school buses to and from summer day camp, with the buses and drivers furnished either through in-kind donations or funded through our grant.

Another key part of Elachee's success was the addition of a bilingual counselor to our summer camp staff, who served as our language interpreter. We found that having a camp staff member for interpretation and translation services throughout the summer was of utmost importance. Not only were we able to more effectively communicate with the families, but this dedicated team member also provided the families with increased trust in us.

Finally, hiring a lead teacher experienced with a variety of student needs proved to be an invaluable asset for Camp Elachee. We appreciated that some of our schools even paid their own staff members to come and support students each day.

We use surveys for participant satisfaction and we collect demographic information on camp registration forms. Using these measurements we will continue to evaluate the effectiveness of this scholarship program in the future.

WELCOMING NEW VISITORS THROUGH PROGRAMS

Another initiative Elachee undertook in 2022 was the grant-funded Community Conservation Series. Elachee is the land management agency that protects

the 1,440 acres of the Chicopee Woods Nature Preserve, part of the 2,674-acre Chicopee Woods Area Park. Crisscrossing the Nature Preserve are over 12 miles of hiking trails, which are an invaluable resource for the physical and mental wellbeing for our local community. Unfortunately, we face the same issues of discrepancy regarding the types of public visitors we see on those hiking trails, which limits our goal of providing this natural resource to all those in our community.

Using grant funding we began a year-long initiative to invite specific groups, among these historically underserved populations, to experience engaging activities in Chicopee Woods. The goals of this program were two-fold. The first was to increase exposure of the Chicopee Woods hiking trails



to visitors who have never been on site, and the second was to encourage revisitation.

Experiences ranged from hosting a popular speaker and influencer for a group of African American teenage girls to speak with while hiking in February for Black History month, to hosting Elachee's very first Hispanic Heritage month program with several cultural groups specializing in authentic Mexican dance performances. For these performances, we worked with local educators to invite students and families from area elementary schools with predominantly Latinx populations, and provided annual parking passes to attendees so that they could hopefully return again and again. In all cases, key successes were that participant feedback was overwhelmingly positive and created a return mechanism for these participants at later events and on self-led hiking trips.

LESSONS LEARNED

In addition to meeting our stated goals, we hope to learn from these grant-funded opportunities so that we can improve in the future.

Overarchingly, we learned that it takes time to create connections and build trust with community groups. Only after these relationships are developed can we better understand ways to more appropriately serve these audiences, both program participants and camp families. Along with the time needed for building relationships, we also learned that when working with organizations, appropriate lead time is key.

Considering the capacity of these organizations and any important time constraints that they had was crucial. For example, school systems needed a little more time to generate plans (particularly near the busy end of the school year), while some community organizations preferred to operate on a shorter time frame.

Taking into consideration experience levels with various activities was also an important opportunity for learning. In the environmental field, we might assume that everyone has appropriate hiking gear or feels comfortable in the woods. However, this is not always the case. Consequently, preparing for a wide range of possibilities and meeting people 'where they are' were of utmost importance.

Elachee plans to continue to engage with our community by expanding our work to include partnering with others to co-create programming, thereby increasing excitement and ownership. Al-

though our organization knows we still have work to do to create a more inclusive environment, we are honored to be part of a community promoting access to nature for all — to discover, learn and play outdoors. 🌱

SAM FRICKS is the Programs & Events Manager, as well as Camp Director at Elachee Nature Science Center. She plans and implements public programming and Camp Elachee summer day camps for the center.

KRISTIN LOVE is the Director of Natural Resources and Conservation at Elachee Nature Science Center. She leads meetings with the Science Advisory Council with the University of North Georgia and works with a dedicated volunteer Trail Crew to maintain the physical and ecological health of the 1,440-acre preserve within Chicopee Woods.



Left: Elachee camp counselors for summer 2022.

Below: Campers with Elachee naturalist examining an earthworm.

Below, left: The Ballet Mexicano dance group performs at Elachee Nature Science Center as part of the Community Conservation Series.





DISCUSSION FORUM HIGHLIGHTS

ANCA hosts two online Discussion Forums where the broader ANCA community can share ideas, questions, challenges, and successes about the nature center profession. The following are some recent conversation topics that received high engagement. We've provided brief descriptions, and you can click the topics and continue the conversation there.

Weather Policies

An inquiry about policies regarding severe weather and the cancellation of programs and/or closing to the public, specifically with respect to high winds.

Nonprofit Centers That Operate Multiple Sites

How do nonprofit nature centers manage multiple locations within the same geographic region? This conversation shares quick insights on partnerships and purpose between multiple sites.

Naturalist Exit Interviews

A discussion about best practices for exit interviews, particularly for naturalists and environmental education practitioners.

Equipment for Outdoor Hybrid Programs

Hybrid programs need the right equipment to be successful — here forum members share their thoughts about specific gear.

QR Codes

For years it seemed that the QR Code was perhaps just a fad, but the pandemic has revitalized this tool. Here the ANCA community shares how they use the codes.



Solar Panels

Harnessing solar energy is theoretically a smart move, but isn't always practical, either logistically or financially. This rich discussion offers different perspectives on the topic.



ASK ANCA

Do you have a question for leaders in the nature & environmental learning center field? Ask the Discussion Forums! One forum is for all nature centers and another is for residential environmental learning centers (RELCs). Anyone can join — you don't need to be a member of ANCA. [Learn about the forums here.](#)



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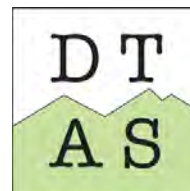


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