

Directions

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

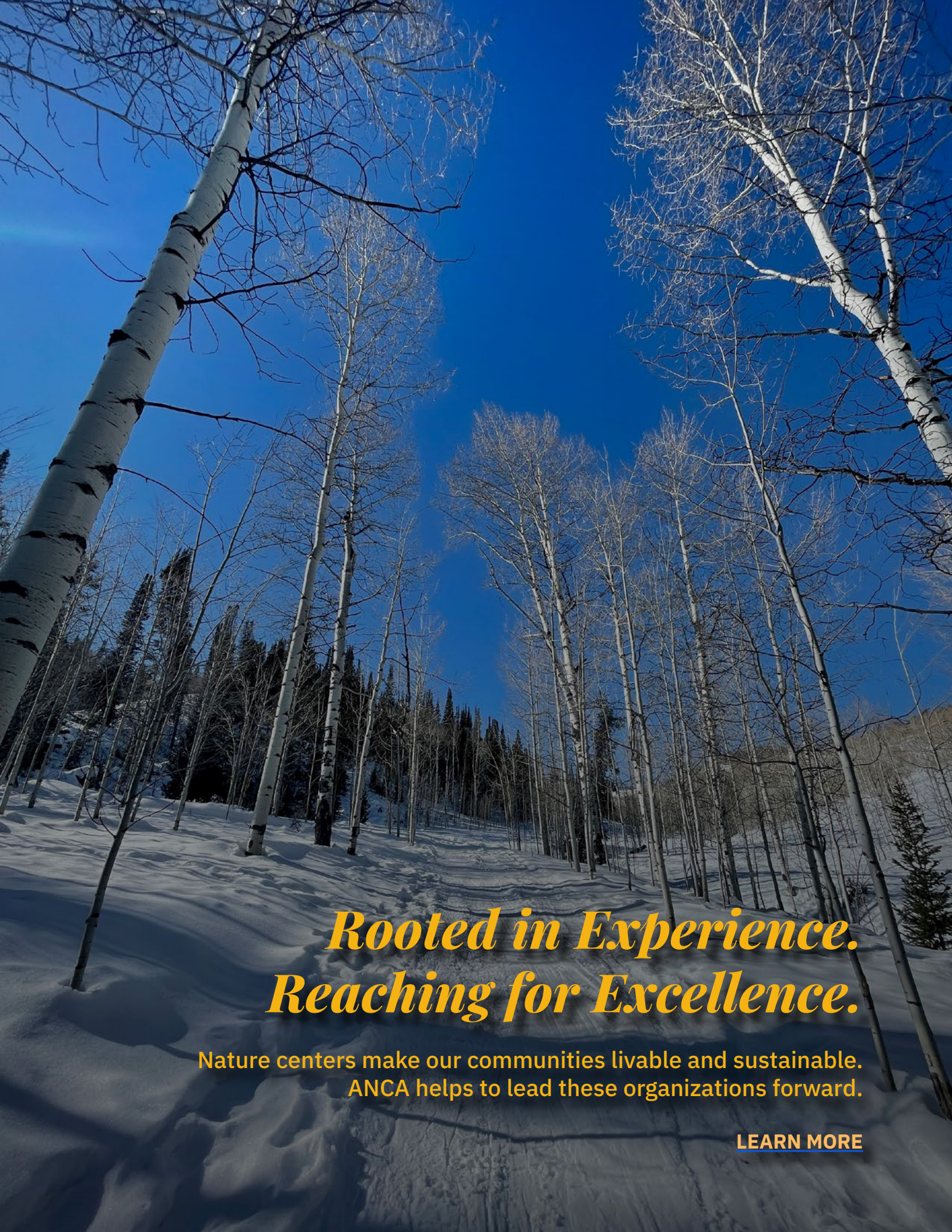


Innovation at Nature Centers

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

SUSTAINABLE
CONSTRUCTION

PAREIDOLIA



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CONTENTS

1-2 Director's Notes

3-8 Innovation &
Nature Centers

9-13 Living Building
Challenge at Cope
Environmental
Center

14-18 Pareidolia

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: Students attend a program in the Margaret A. Cargill Lodge at Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center in Finland, Minn. Photo by Chad Holder.

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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Don't want to read on a screen? Print this issue – and then pass it onto other nature center staff!

Director's Notes: Not Everything Has Changed

Jen Levy, ANCA Executive Director



Though the pandemic has impacted every decision in the last two years, our mission and values have endured.



IN February 2020, I was preparing for ANCA's in-person planning retreat and winter board meeting. We were making significant progress on our strategic priorities, and I was looking forward to the opportunity to meet in-person with the board and focus uninterrupted on ANCA projects.

The meeting was held at Irvine Nature Center in Owings Mills, Md. We celebrated strategic accomplishments, renewed existing goals and work plans, and we left with a strong sense of purpose and a plan for the year. During the meeting, the news broke of the first U.S. case of COVID-19 in Washington state, and almost everything changed within a matter of weeks.

Not everything has changed, however. In a meeting last month of the ANCA CONNECTS Committee, Dennis Pilaske, ED of the Chippewa Nature Center, said, "COVID has informed every decision we have made over the past two years, but it has not changed our missions." Wise words that I have repeated almost everyday since that meeting.

Photo at top: A view of the Bear River Mountains from Smithfield, Utah, where ANCA recently hosted a winter retreat for the staff and board. Opposite page, left: Staff and board hold a hybrid meeting. Opposite page, right: A selfie from a snowshoe program that staff and board did through Stokes Nature Center in Logan, Utah.

The Association of Nature Center Administrators promotes and supports best leadership and management practices for the nature and environmental learning center profession. Our mission has not changed.

As an organization, a staff, and a board, we are an inclusive, welcoming, and supportive community. We value learning and sharing. We believe that the collective wisdom and diversity of our peer network is our greatest resource. Our core values have not changed.

Despite the challenges of the past two years, we have made significant progress toward **our strategic goals**. Here I want to share our work on three of these goals:

ANCA will maintain best practices that promote diversity, equity, and inclusiveness within our membership and the profession.

As leaders, we need to understand if decisions are fair, voices are heard, and if our current and future staff see opportunities for themselves in the future or our organizations. The ANCA Culture Survey, launched in early January, will provide the data we need to better understand needed changes in our profession. The accompanying Equity Audit will help us prioritize the professional development needs of our members. We will receive reports from each survey soon, and I look forward to the work ahead.

Director's Notes (cont.)

ANCA will explore and define our voice toward relevant advocacy and civic engagement.

One year ago, the ANCA Board approved the **ANCA Public Policy and Advocacy Strategy (pdf)**. Our strategy includes *working to increase financial support to the field of nature and outdoor education*. Since April 2020, I have been meeting with a small group of residential environmental learning center (RELC) leaders through the ANCA CONNECTS program. Initially we met to discuss the pandemic and the devastating impact it has had on ANCA members who provide overnight accommodations and food services to their students. The conversations quickly evolved into a discussion about how we can work together to increase financial support, including federal support, for our field and be recognized as *essential*. With funds raised by this group of RELC leaders, we hired a legislative consulting firm to conduct an assessment of federal funding opportunities and develop an Action Plan for a federal legislative initiative. We are still in the process of working with the consultants, Solomon Strategies Group, and are encouraged by the news of the possible reintroduction of the *No Child Left Inside Bill*. We are reaching out to our legislators and working on a case for support. We will also continue to research additional proposed federal legislation that might be a source of support. Most importantly, we are determining the feasibility of hiring federal lobbyists to help us achieve our goals.

ANCA will have organizational capacity and financial stability to meet its current and future objectives.

In November we welcomed Dan Auer to the ANCA Staff as our new Membership & Programs Coordinator. Dan, an ANCA member since 2017, has worked at both residential environmental learning centers and nature centers in a variety of roles, and he brings over a decade of experience in our profession to this position. In this newly-created role, Dan will serve as the main contact person for ANCA members and business partners, and coordinate ANCA events including the Annual Summit, the RELC Summit, and ANCA CONNECTS programs.

I am especially excited to welcome Dan to the staff as our first full-time Membership and Programs Coordinator. In July, Asa Duffee, Director of Marketing & Communications, was promoted to full-time, and for the first time in our history ANCA employs three full-time professionals. This has been a vision of ours for several years and I am thrilled we have been able to grow our organizational capacity to better serve our members and the profession.

I am elated to report that the ANCA Staff and several Board Members met in-person here in Utah for our 2022 Winter Retreat. This was our first in-person staff and board meeting in two years, and thanks to our COVID vaccination protocols, we conducted a safe and productive meeting. COVID continues to inform our decisions, especially around meetings and events, but our mission has not changed. I look forward to continuing our work. 🌱



Moving the Field Forward: Nature Centers & Innovation



by Asa Duffee
ANCA Director of Marketing & Communications

Students attend a program in the Margaret A. Cargill Lodge at Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center in Finland, Minn. Photo by Chad Holder.

A look at how some nature centers are pushing the boundaries of “business as usual.”

TRADITIONAL NATURE EDUCATION is a standard experience at nature and environmental learning centers, in which program participants learn skills such as wild plant identification, or concepts such as insect life cycles. Such programs are historically the “bread and butter” of nature centers, and have undoubtedly impacted millions of participants’ lives in some way.

However, that nature education does not necessarily provide the solutions that those organizations seek. We face environmental and social challenges that are complex and widespread, and therefore we need holistic solutions on both individual and community levels. For nature centers to advance as a field, they must seek out effective new ways to engage their communities and foster connection with the environment. In other words, they need to be innovative.

Such innovative nature and environmental learning centers can be agents for systemic change, taking on bold new initiatives that address widespread environmental and social issues, such as climate change, habitat loss, and inequities in education. These organizations facilitate experiences for their constituents to become more connected with nature and each other, while also advancing their larger communities to become more sustainable and equitable.

Nature Centers & Innovation (cont.)

Of course there’s no one objective answer to how a nature center can be innovative on a practical level, as it will depend on the organization’s mission and resources. Some innovative trends that the nature center field has seen, however, include sustainable construction, regenerative agriculture, and environmental education training for school teachers. Here we explore these examples and what such innovation has meant for some organizations.

WOLF RIDGE ACHIEVES FIRST-IN-THE-WORLD CERTIFICATION

As ANCA has shared before, the Living Building Challenge (LBC) is a premiere certification for sustainable buildings; as of this writing only thirty buildings have received a full LBC certification, while forty-three have received partial certification. Though achieving LBC certification is indeed an example of innovation for any organization, **Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center** in Finland, Minn, earned additional recognition for its Margaret A. Cargill (MAC) Lodge this past October — **it became the first renovation project to receive full LBC status**, as all other LBC certifications have gone to newly constructed buildings. The building is also in the coldest climate to receive certification.

Wolf Ridge Executive Director Pete Smerud notes that when the organization decided to take on the challenge of LBC certification, they were looking to set goals that were inspirational and transformative for their community — not just to remodel a building.

“We needed to push people to think not about making buildings better,” Smerud says, “but about making our relationship with the planet better.”

A first-of-its-kind project takes significant work and planning, however. Even before doing the MAC Lodge renovations, Wolf Ridge built the Lakeview Staff House, a new dormitory set to LBC standards but not certified. This gave the Wolf Ridge team the opportunity to learn during the process and ensure that the MAC Lodge would be a success. While they didn’t attain the certification for the staff house, it still accomplished their goals of sustainable expansion, and can be used as an educational tool.

Both projects undoubtedly had a major impact on Wolf Ridge’s community. Smerud notes that multiple companies involved in the construction were significantly invested in the result, not simply as a business opportunity, but because it pushed them to develop sustainable products and services. As one example, Wolf Ridge had chosen a national manufacturer for paint, but late into construction, they discovered that the paint couldn’t be approved for LBC standards. Wolf Ridge put out the call for a new paint, and found that



CURIOUS ABOUT SUSTAINABLE CONSTRUCTION?

Learn more about the Living Building Challenge on page 9, where Karin Hostetter, Executive Director of Cope Environmental Center in Centerville, Ind., details the process of getting certified.

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An aerial view of the MAC Lodge in fall. Photo by Chad Holder.

based on their request from a year prior, Benjamin Moore & Co. had developed a compliant paint and gotten LBC approved — even though Wolf Ridge had not originally selected their product line. As a result, Benjamin Moore changed one of its most popular products to become more sustainable.

Naturally, Wolf Ridge then chose them for the job.

The impact extends beyond the construction phase as well. The MAC Lodge is made to be an educational tool, and students who stay there learn about energy conservation and climate change specifically through the context of the building — not just on a theoretical level, but with actual observations of their own energy consumption.

Smerud acknowledges that the LBC certification required years of dedicated work, but notes that because Wolf Ridge spearheaded such efforts, “future LBC projects will be so much easier.”

Pete Smerud, Executive Director of Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center. Photo by Chad Holder.

Speaking to environmental issues more broadly, too, Smerud notes that he is often asked if the state of the environment is depressing, given the challenges.

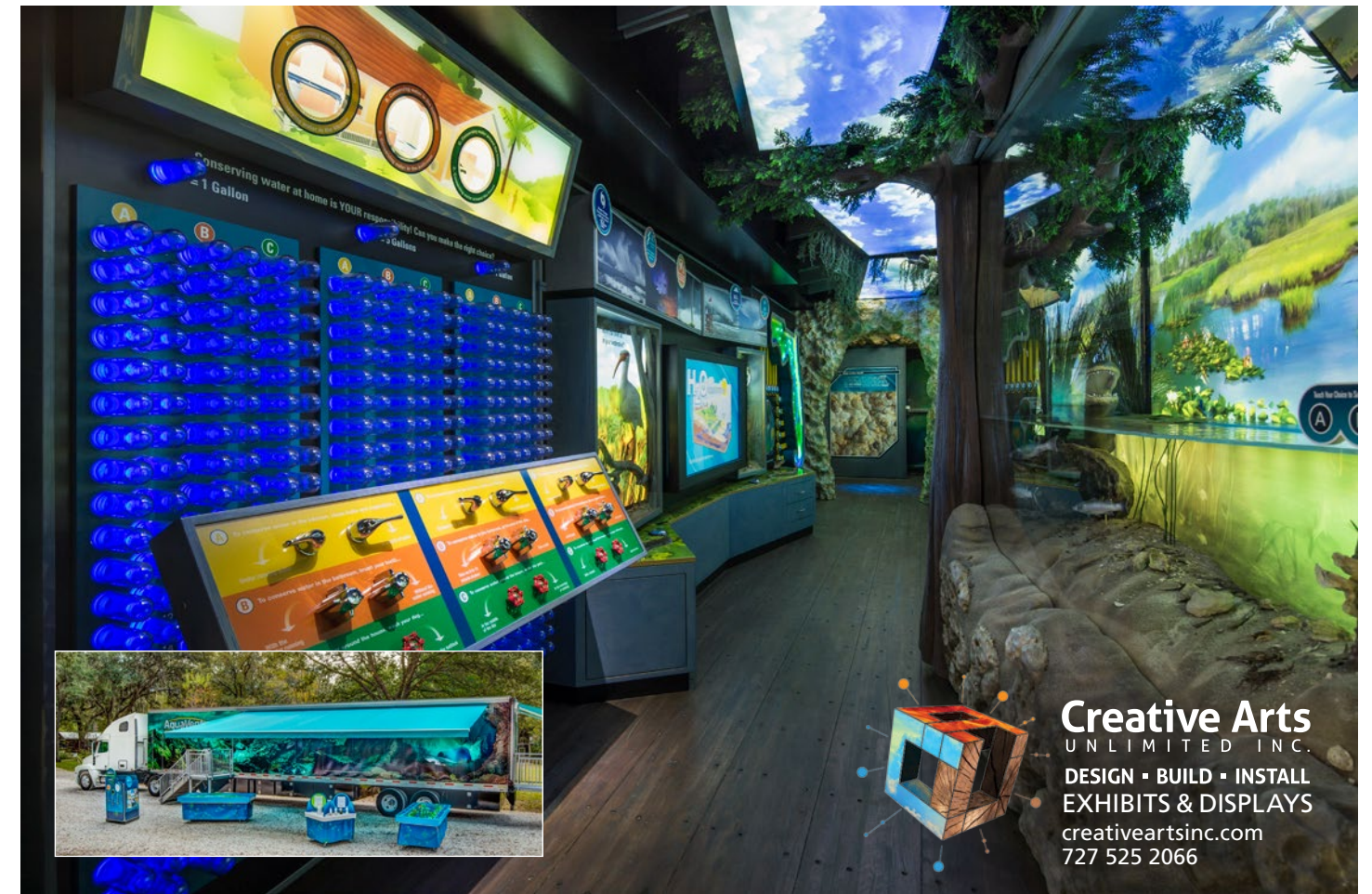
“Absolutely not,” he answers. “I have watched again and again ... mammoth changes occur because a small group of people says there’s a better way.”

BLANDFORD NATURE CENTER’S FARM USES A UNIQUE CUSTOMER MODEL


Farms are not an unusual feature at nature centers — in fact, in the mid-2000s ANCA held an annual Farm Education Symposium, which led to the creation of the [Farm-Based Education Network](#). Farming naturally fits into the sustainability that nature centers promote, including at [Blandford Nature Center](#) in Grand Rapids, Mich.

“Everybody has to eat,” says [Blandford Farm](#) Manager Elizabeth Visser. “So if you’re able to eat in a way that has less of an impact on the environment, I think that’s one of the number one things we can do to be sustainable in our day-to-day choices.”

Blandford Farm has hosted educational programs since 2010, when it also began to sell produce at the local farmers market. Since then the farm has steadily




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Nature Centers & Innovation (cont.)

grown and developed new ways of creating connections with Blandford Nature Center’s constituents, such as through its community-supported agriculture (CSA) model.

“Community-supported agriculture” as a specific term and concept **was founded in 1986**, and has since developed into a common model for small-scale farms throughout the US and elsewhere. In a CSA, a participant buys a share of a farm for a season, and in turn receives a portion of produce, typically on a weekly basis. This provides a steady source of revenue for the farm while participants receive fresh local produce. The model is also beneficial for sustainability, since it is structured on what the soil produces in a given season, rather than on only the customer’s interests.

Though many nature centers have sustainable agriculture operations, the CSA model is still relatively uncommon among nature center farms. Visser sees it as an opportunity to develop more substantial connections, not unlike a general membership model for a nature center.

“The CSA members are able to connect more deeply,” she says.

Not only do the CSA members receive food each week for a sustained period of time, but they also develop a personal relationship with the farm and nature center staff. Some members have now been participating in the CSA for years.

Blandford farm offers multiple types of CSAs throughout the year, with over 100 members for their most popular 20-week option in the late summer and early fall. Other options include herb and flower CSAs, which are growing in popularity.

Visser says that she hopes to continue innovating with farm programming beyond the CSA, and try new programs such as educating people on how to grow their own food. From her perspective, developing new programs and systems is essential to Blandford’s mission of engaging and empowering its community through enriching experiences in nature.

“The more you can get people interested and connected to a sense of place,” she says, “the more they’re going to want to care about it and want to do things to protect it.”

INNOVATION CHANGES WITH TIME

Of course, nature centers cannot innovate only for the sake of innovation; changes must be coupled



Left: Examples of CSA shares at Blandford Farm. Right: Blandford Farm Manager Elizabeth Visser holds a stalk of Brussels sprouts.

Nature Centers & Innovation (cont.)

with strategic goals and effective implementation. When done correctly, however, nature centers can have profound and transformative new impacts on their communities. In doing so these organizations can be examples of constant improvement and can lead other organizations to make beneficial changes.

As Smerud notes of the LBC certification, too, innovation changes with time.

“Thirty years from now, there will be a new model,” he says, “and all of what we’ve done now will be looked at as obsolete.”

In this case, that obsolescence is a welcome change, as we hope to see the current high standards become the norm — but that wouldn’t be possible without the initial innovation. 🌱

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Update on Tremont’s Schooyard Network

Last year **we featured an article** about how the Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont in Townsend, Tenn. was connecting with school teachers. Since their project was a great example of innovation, we asked for a brief update on what they’re up to.

The Schooyard Network (previously called the Community for Schooyard Teaching and Learning) has a few exciting updates. Our monthly virtual gatherings continue to bring in a core group of local teachers, and we have also recruited 41 new faces since last Fall to share experiences getting kids outside at school. We’ve found a lot of energy around allowing teachers to share ways they have taken their kids outside in the past month (no outside experience is too small!) and seek advice about any challenges they may have faced. Tremont was also able to fill a position left vacant during COVID and hired a full time Manager of the Teacher Network, Annie Roth. With the additional staff support, we are expanding our reach within our local community.

From the start, one of our goals was to meet in person to facilitate curiosity in the outdoor spaces of our local educators, and in May 2022 we will do just that. Our **Schooyard Escape** workshop will take place in an elementary schooyard in Knoxville and target teachers from East Tennessee. Having first hand experiences in our local schooyards promotes a connection to place, increases the relevancy reigniting the “why” for teachers, and provides the tools to share these adventures with students. It will be a fun opportunity for teachers to harness their own innate curiosity and wonder as learners, and spread this joy to their students.

Curious to learn more? **Click here** for information about The Schooyard Network, or to read write ups of previous meetings.

— Erin Canter, Manager of Science Literacy and Research, Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont

It Takes A Village: Cope Environmental Center's Journey to a Living Building

by Karin Hostetter, Executive Director
Cope Environmental Center
Centerville, Ind.

RECENTLY, COPE ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER (CEC) ACHIEVED A GREAT MILESTONE. In May of 2021, we received notification that we were officially a fully certified Living Building through the International Living Future Institute (ILFI). Celebrated publicly this past October, it was the first such building in Indiana and only the 29th in the world. Several years in the making, the accomplishment was realized due to the hard work of a village of people.

It began with one couple. Jim and Helen Cope had raised their family of four on 30 acres in Centerville, Ind. Jim taught ornithology at Earlham College and Helen taught biology at the local high school. After retiring as a professor, Jim served as director of **Conner Prairie** located just north of Indianapolis. Jim was an area expert on the endangered Indiana bat (*Myotis sodalis*). He had a Scotch and white pine Christmas tree farm and a grove of conifers with species from around the world — just to see if they would

Cope Environmental Center's Living Building. The lower overhang is a specific depth to match the seasonal movement of the sun, allowing for passive warmth in winter and shade in summer.



It Takes A Village (cont.)

grow here. Helen was an expert gardener, partly out of the necessity of feeding five children in the rural Midwest. The children spent their summers with family and household chores and learning to swim in the pond behind the house.

By now you might be wondering, “What is so extraordinary about all this?” The answer is *nothing* — and that is the point. This was a typical, Midwest, farming area family. But upon retirement, ideas and plans started to form. Jim continued to want people to know and understand nature and Helen had become very interested in the new concept of sustainable living. They decided that when they were no longer able to live on the farm, they did not want it to be developed. They wanted to leave it to the community as a natural place to explore, learn, and reflect. Cope Environmental Center was born in 1992 with a 28-acre family farm.

But the Copes could not accomplish the plan on their own. Sharing the idea, two became three as Francis Parks provided the initial financial support needed. Not much later, three became four when neighbor and fellow biology professor at Earlham College Gertrude “Lucky” Ward willed her 70 acres of adjoining land to the young environmental center. Already, the lone house had grown to a small settlement on the edge of town.

THE SETTLEMENT GROWS

Programs were offered and trails developed and used, and the community appreciated CEC for its new role in the community. A small building was built beside the farmhouse as a place for staff offices, storage, school field trips, and public programs. The settlement was now a true village — an environmental center with a solid niche in the community. Success grew and within 20 years, the space was too small. Discussions began on what

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to build in the future that would better suit the needs of the growing organization. “Future” became “now” when the fire department announced that board meetings could no longer be held on site because they surpassed building capacity code. What to build was now a critical issue.

THE VILLAGE UNITES

Obviously, the building needed to be a visual representation of the mission of sustainability and be “green.” The popular LEED program was an option, but was there something available that was more encompassing and that offered higher expectations? Should CEC consider developing its own certification program? Upon deeper research, the board found ILFI and their **Living Building Challenge** (LBC). It was exactly the program for CEC’s mission and the vision of the founders. The LBC encompassed the

building, the people, and the environment. The CEC village knew this was the course to take, even though a bit ambitious

A Living Building is the highest level of sustainable construction offered by ILFI. Not only does this program look at green construction, but also addresses the health of visitors and staff as well as the connection of the construction to the environment. The program is composed of seven petals or categories, each with several components to meet. To be certified as a Living Building, all seven categories must be met. An option exists to choose in one or more of the individual categories, meet those components and be petal certified. The community comprising Cope Environ-

Right: Inside Cope Environmental Center’s Living Building. The floor helps control temperature via radiant heating and cooling tubes within the concrete.



PETALS OF THE LIVING BUILDING CHALLENGE

The Living Building Challenge is composed of seven “petals,” or performance categories. To receive a full certification under the Living Building Challenge, a building must perform sufficiently in each petal. The following is a description of each petal and how Cope Environmental Center achieves within the category.



PLACE

What it means: For every acre used for construction, an equal acre of previously unprotected land must be placed under a

conservation easement and restored to natural vegetation.

What CEC does: Five acres of land are in conservation easement with Red-tail Land Conservancy.



WATER

What it means: Water usage on-site must not be more than the rainwater/groundwater recharge amount on the footprint of the construction.

What CEC does: From Jim Cope’s thirty years of recording daily weather, we knew the exact average rainfall for our site. Well water for our water supply, water-permeable parking surface, rain garden for watering landscaping, and rain barrel collection for watering potted plants and a birdbath all work together to balance consumption with replenishment.



ENERGY

What it means: We must produce all the energy we consume. **What CEC does:** Solar panels produce enough power to put

energy back into the grid. Geothermal and radiant floor heating and cooling, heavily insulated walls, high efficiency windows, automatically controlled room temperature and lights, and natural lighting tubes reduce our need for manufactured energy. Even the building’s orientation and the overhang on the south side are designed with the location of the sun in the sky throughout the seasons in mind and maximize passive solar heating in the building year-round.



HEALTH & HAPPINESS

What it means: Health of visitors and staff are considered.

What CEC does: Green plants are placed throughout the building. Operable windows allow fresh air to flow through the building. Cleaning products are natural. Every room has a view of the outside.



MATERIALS

What it means: All materials used in construction are human and environment friendly. A list of 19 “red list

chemicals” is avoided. **What CEC does:** Building product manufacturers submit complete lists of chemicals used to produce all materials and verify the distance traveled from manufacturing plant to building site. Building materials are free of PVC, formaldehyde, and volatile organic compounds. Most everything in the building is made in North America. All lumber is Forestry Stewardship Council certified, with the exception of specialty items that were created using ash trees affected by the emerald ash borer, and unused wood from local carpenters. Repurposed doors for staff desks, repurposed barn doors as interior accents, and an interior wall made of recycled bottle caps collected by local schoolchildren make the space both uniquely sustainable and beautiful.



EQUITY

What it means: Equal access to nature for all people. **What CEC does:** Even though ADA-compliant

by law, we are proud to be accessible and welcoming to everyone. Windows are of varying heights or full wall heights so everyone can see out no matter how tall a visitor is or whether standing or sitting. Interpretive signage explains the Living Building Challenge in non-technical terms. Outside areas by the building and the closest trails are accessible to strollers and wheelchairs being pulled or pushed by an assistant. Additionally, CEC offers many free services and programs.



BEAUTY

What it means: Create buildings that elevate our spirits through aesthetically pleasing designs. **What CEC does:**

Windows are large and placed everywhere, immersing occupants in nature even when inside. Wood trim is used liberally throughout the inside, bringing the beauty of nature into the inside space. Our unique bottle cap wall is painted to represent land, flowers, and sky. Local art is displayed permanently and seasonally enhancing the interior beauty of the building.



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It Takes A Village (cont.)

mental Center embraced the full living building challenge.

As anyone who has ever built a building or a home or even done any remodeling knows, the road ahead was sometimes a pleasant daydream and other times a waking nightmare. The next nine years of planning and building brought challenges and celebrations, learning and training, frustrations and successes. The village remained united and on course, and the success was worth the work and learning. In May 2021, the building was fully certified.

THE VILLAGE THRIVES

Will the Village become a town? How will being a Certified Living Building inform and guide our future? Cope Environmental Center’s mission is “to promote the sustainable use of the earth’s resources through education, demonstration, and research” with a vision “to inspire and challenge individuals and communities to achieve ecologically sustainable lifestyles to secure a sustainable future for all life on earth.” The Living Building is one step on that ambitious journey. The accomplishment we are now enjoying will somehow guide the village to reach out to other villages. How will we be a resource for both the local and broader community on what is possible at the family and business levels? One thing we know for certain is that it will take a village to move into the future as the world’s environmental needs and challenges grow each day. 🌱

*Karin Hostetter is the Executive Director of **Cope Environmental Center**. You can reach her at k.hostetter@copeenvironmental.org.*

Pareidolia: Looking Beyond the Surface

An imaginative activity holds potential for new tools and research.

by Asa Duffee, ANCA Director of Marketing & Communications



© Pat Bernstein

PAREIDOLIA (pronounced “par-eh-DOL-ia”) is a phenomenon that you’ve likely experienced, even if you didn’t know the word — it’s when you experience familiar images or sounds in unfamiliar places, such as seeing the silhouette of an animal in the clouds.

Since our brains are primed to detect patterns, engaging in pareidolia can be a common activity, especially for children. Beyond a fun activity, however, the phenomenon may contain deeper medical and educational benefits that we are only beginning to understand. Because of its connection to nature, education, and health, pareidolia may be particularly useful as a tool for nature center programs.

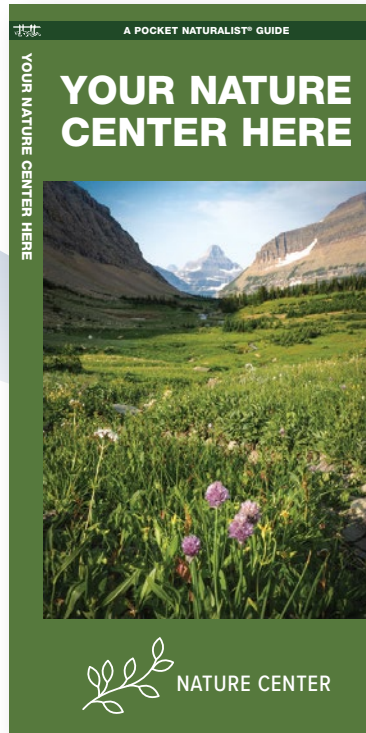
Try pareidolia right here — we’ve included five pictures in this article. Examine the photos and see what you can find! On page 18 we have smaller versions of the pictures with possible outlines. All photos by Pat Bernstein, used with permission.



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An expert on pareidolia, Pat Bernstein is working to advance our understanding of this instinct. Though Bernstein has always enjoyed walks in the woods, her experience in nature changed after 2015, when she underwent surgery to remove a meningeal tumor just outside the brain. Months later Bernstein went to walk in the woods for the first time since the surgery, and immediately witnessed a tree with cut-off limbs, which she interpreted as out-reached arms that welcomed her back to nature.

Though she didn't yet know the word "pareidolia," Bernstein started to document her experience of this phenomenon as she continued to explore natural environments. Once she learned the term, she tapped into the history and research behind pareidolia, and came to create the website [Blink to See](#) to introduce this vision to diverse groups.

Pareidolia as an activity is accessible and imagina-

tive. It requires no special equipment and is available to all ages. While the most common examples are visual, eyesight is not required — the phenomenon can be auditory, such as hearing words within natural sounds.

Engaging with the natural world this way can transform your experience in nature, notes Bernstein.

"For those who are able to turn on this instinct, it generates an automatic smile," she says. "With pareidolia, the experience is always a happy one."

Pareidolia goes deeper than an enjoyable activity, though. When performed in a natural setting and linked to forest bathing — a form of mindfulness in nature — it enhances awareness of one's surroundings. Such activities have been associated with [lower blood pressure and reduced anxiety, depression, and fatigue](#).

Even outside of a natural setting, however, pareidolia itself has unique benefits. One of the most concrete examples is the use of pareidolia as a tool [to help identify Lewy body dementia](#). Researchers have also found that pareidolia is an [effective tool in radiology education](#), helping medical students retain interest and knowledge in radiology.

Medical research involving pareidolia is not extensive, however, so Bernstein has recently been pushing for proposals on more research. Encouraged by her advocacy, researchers at Johns Hopkins Medicine are now investigating pareidolia's impact on the brain and studying its benefits for enhancing skill development.

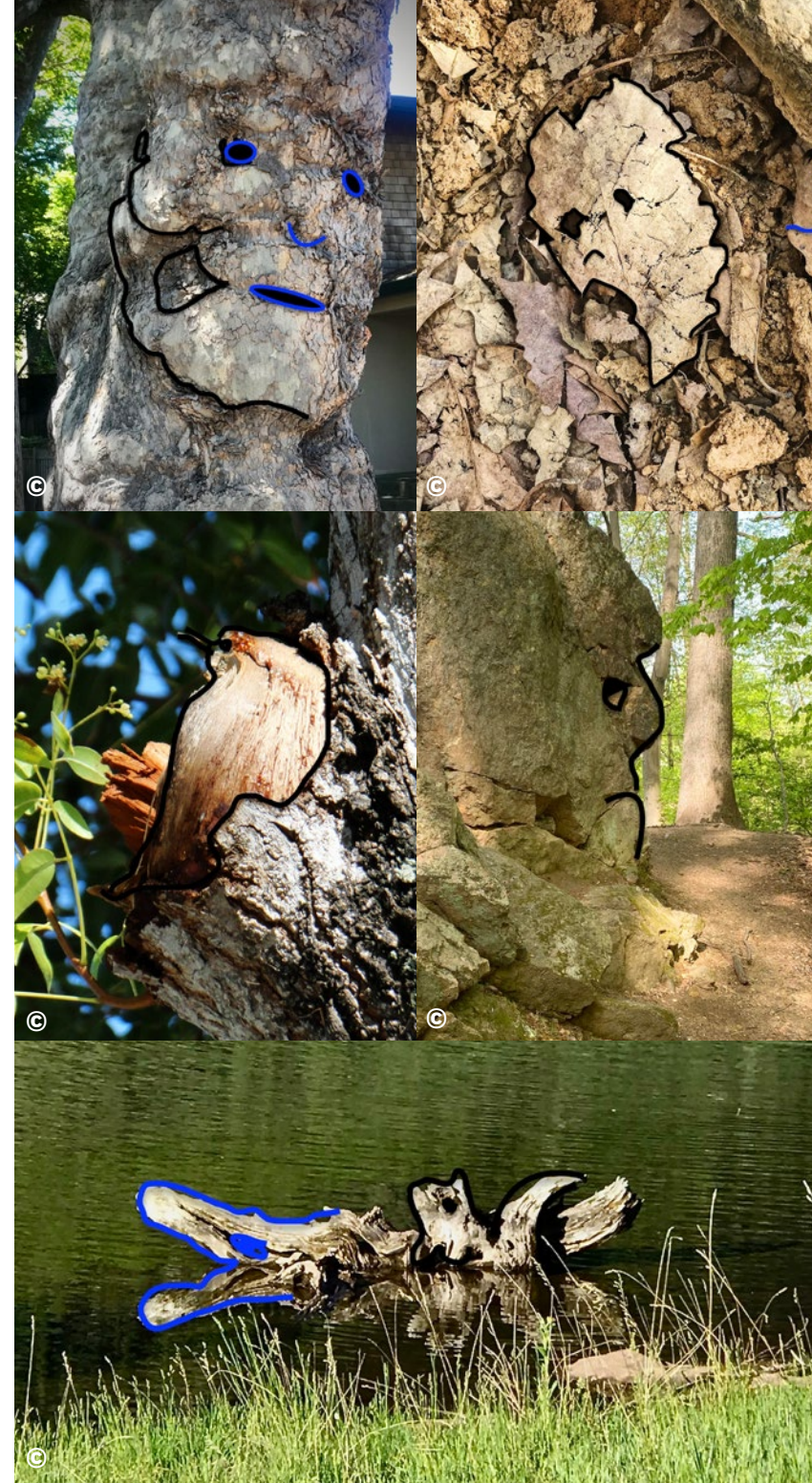
Since pareidolia in nature can be an educational and medical tool, Bernstein sees a possible niche within the nature center field. This past summer Bernstein hosted a program on pareidolia at Irvine

Nature Center in Owings Mills, Md., where over 50 people learned about the experiential tool.

"When I first went for a walk with Pat to learn more about pareidolia, I was immediately intrigued," says Brooks Paternotte, Executive Director of Irvine Nature Center. "It put a name to a phenomenon I had often experienced when exploring nature and got me thinking about its potential at places like Irvine."

Bernstein and staff at Irvine are now in discussions about creating a pareidolia workbook that educators at the center — and possibly other nature centers — could use. The phenomenon could easily be applied to educational programs at nature centers, as well as events pertaining to health and wellbeing.





Above: Pat Bernstein's outlines of what she sees in the previous photos.

Next time you venture outside, see what shapes you can find within natural formations — you just might discover that you're already accompanied by welcoming faces. 🌿

Learn more about pareidolia at Pat Bernstein's website, [Blink to See](#). If you snap a picture of your pareidolia experience, share with others by tagging [@blink to see](#) and [@anca pics](#) on Instagram.

ANCA DISCUSSION FORUMS

Do you have a question for leaders in the nature & environmental learning center field? We have two online forums for people to share ideas, questions, challenges, and successes about the nature center profession. Not only can you find helpful insights, but the discussions also inform ANCA's programming for events such as the ANCA Summit and our CONNECTS meetings.

One forum is for all nature centers and another is for residential environmental learning centers (RELCs). Anyone can join — you do not need to be a member of ANCA. [Learn more about the forums here.](#)

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