



# THE WARBLER

*A periodic newsletter of the Friends of Welty Environmental Center  
Volume 18, Issue 1*

## WELTY'S MISSION

To provide leadership in environmental and ecological education to students, teachers, and individuals of all ages, so that residents of this region can make informed decisions leading to respect for and the enjoyment, preservation, and sustainable use of our natural resources.

## 2018-19 BOARD

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## MY FIRST SUMMER AT WELTY by Aaron Wilson



Summer was an amazing time of year to jump into the role of program director at Welty. I got to experience first hand the overwhelming support and demand that the Stateline Area has for environmental programming. The desire that parents and children have for being outside to enjoy and learn about our plant's ecological support systems gives me hope for a future that is clean, healthy, and bright. Programming reached roughly 3,000 people through summer partnerships with City of Beloit Parks and Rec, Community Action, Even Start, Green-Rock Audubon

Society, Nature at the Confluence, Robinson Elementary, and half a dozen community libraries. And Thursday public programming was a blast, meeting many staunch advocates of Welty's mission.

However, quality programming could not happen without the support of our troop of volunteers. Just since the end of May, we have counted on 158 volunteer hours to help us give participants hands-on experiences. In an age where learning is becoming increasingly more digital for its ease and access (which is not bad), Welty and its volunteers are filling critical hands-on and dirt-under-the-fingernails experiences in ecological thinking. Book and digital learning is great for content delivery and retention, but nothing can replace the true value of getting dirty and seeing how environmental systems interact first hand.

Charging forward into the school year and the autumn months, we are collaborating with the Beloit School District to bring hands-on experiences to hundreds of kids through field trips to the Welty Center at Big Hill Park and during after school programming funded by 21st Century Community Learning Centers grants. To make all of this possible, we count on your volunteer support. If you are looking to get involved, please contact me. Together, we provide the experience and the context for future generations to create a sustainable habitat for all life.

## WELTY HOSTED COMMUNITY ACTION OVERNIGHTS IN JULY



*Community Action PREP students complete a scavenger hunt at Big Hill Park during their overnight.*

Welty received a \$2000 Community Impact Grant from Stateline Community Foundation to support two overnight visits for participants in PREP (Personal Responsibility Education Program) run by Community Action, for students attending the School District of Beloit's summer school. The grant supports a collaborative effort between Welty Environmental Center, Community Action, and the City of Beloit Parks and Recreation Department (who provided the space, built a fire circle, and organized cookouts with the City of Beloit's Fire Department).

On two different weekends (July 6-7 for 8-12 yr. olds and July 20-22 for 13-17 yr. olds), *(cont'd p. 3)*

2018 BIG HILL ADVENTURE CAMP by Andy Tuczynski



This summer, Welty and the City of Beloit collaborated to provide children a new version of Big Hill Adventure Camp. Most of camp occurred at Big Hill Park where children went on hikes to explore the forest, prairie, and learn about nature. Weekly field trips allowed campers to enjoy additional summertime activities at other locations in Beloit. Wednesday's camp took place at River-

side Park. A variety of activities were offered at the park, including: canoeing and using the paddle boats on the lagoon; hiking along the Beloit River Walk to look for insects; brushing up on tennis skills at the four courts nearby; learning how to fish and catching (and releasing) some fish; catching aquatic organisms with big nets; and spending time at Turtle Island playground. Thursday mornings the camp instructors and the campers boarded a bus and were taken to Krueger Pool. Krueger pool, also known as "The Big Pool," allowed the children to escape the heat while swimming and splashing around.

I don't currently live in Beloit. So I need to confess, spending time at these places made me appreciate and get to know the diverse sides of Beloit. In addition, I was fortunate enough to have met and work with some amazing employees from the City of Beloit. We all had one goal in mind and that was to make the most out of our collaboration. Building camaraderie and morale with camp staff allowed campers to have many great experiences and created lasting memories for those who attended Big Hill Adventure Camp.

SUMMER EVENTS AT WELTY

This summer over 3300 people participated in Welty programming, 69% of them children. Here is a look at what was going on:



Beloit's Robinson Summer School brought 300 students for insect life field trips (above, below). Funding was provided by Green-Rock Audubon.



Welty partnered with the City of Beloit for 10 weeks of Big Hill Adventure Camp with 267 campers at the Center.



Over the summer Welty sponsored tables at 5 different expos, including the Beloit Farmers' Market.



WELTY FALL CALENDAR

OCTOBER

- 4 (THURSDAY) Campfire Desserts at NATC  
3:30-5pm, All ages at 306 S. Dickop, S. Beloit, \$5 donation
- 12 (FRIDAY) No School Friday (repeats Nov. 2, Dec. 14)  
8am-5pm, Ages 6-12 at Welty Center, \$30/mem, \$35/non
- 9 (TUESDAY) Goldenrod Gall Fly: Important Winter Food  
3:30-5pm, All ages at Welty Center, \$5 donation

NOVEMBER

- 6 (TUESDAY) Clouds, Clouds, Go Away: the Hydrologic Cycle  
3:30-5pm, All ages at Welty center, \$5 donation
- 20 (TUESDAY) Talk Turkey  
3:30-5pm, All ages at Welty center, \$5 donation

DECEMBER

- 6 (THURSDAY) Candy Cane Hunt at NATC  
3:30-5pm, All ages at 306 S. Dickop, S. Beloit, \$5 donation
- 18 (TUESDAY) Cold Hike  
3:30-5pm, All ages at Welty center, \$5 donation

**SUMMER EVENTS (CONT'D)**



Welty continued our partnership with Nature at the Confluence; we completed a stream monitoring project on Kelly Creek, presented 4 programs, and ran 4 grant-writing workshops.



Regional libraries invited us to present on nature themes, such as rocks and aquatic ecology. Welty visited 6 sites, including the Waterford Public Library on the Fox River (above).



Welty ended the summer with 2 weeks of our own camp, which included the close study of mud pit ecology (above) and Goose Creek



**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE** by Brenda K. Plakans



Ah, 2018 was such a wonderful summer with the sounds of camp echoing through Big Hill Center all three months. We are still chipping away at some of the mud that got tracked in, but it is a joy to see the physical evidence of kids getting outside and getting into the dirt. Aaron and Andy are the true champs of all of this successful programming—almost three times as many participants as last year came to visit Welty!

The backdrop of engaged families, and well-attended programs makes my work that much easier...which is promoting the value of Welty to Stateline residents and establishing partnerships that increase our reach. Our collaborations continue into the fall and bring many new groups to Big Hill, who we haven't worked with in the past. We received a Stateline Community Foundation grant to host Community Action students at the park for overnights (see below), Green-Rock Audubon Society funded field trips for the entire Robinson summer school (p. 2), G-RAS and Rock County Conservationist volunteers continue to lead work days in the prairie adjacent to the Center, southern Illinois families came to our programs at Nature at the Confluence (left), and—of course—the summer-long day camps would not have been possible without our partnership with the City of Beloit Parks and Recreation Department.

As our visibility continues to grow, we are strategizing our position to increase our financial security. We still get the vast majority of our funding from our Annual Appeals (November and July), but we are starting to work with granting agencies to increase the size of our requests and projects (stay tuned on that front). We are also reaching out to area school districts and service organizations to find new venues for our programming; we've heard from more Janesville groups and hosted 4 field trips this past spring, thanks to this outreach effort. Our finance committee is meeting this month to review our investment strategies and will start to promote contributions to our Carl and Susan Welty Agency Fund at the Stateline Community Foundation (more in this year's Appeal letter).

This progress is all very exciting, and very appropriate, considering next year's milestone: Welty's 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary! The Special Events committee has already started planning, and there are some really super activities in store. We can't wait to celebrate Welty's successes with you, especially because we wouldn't have them to celebrate without all the support we've received from our members and volunteers over the past two decades. Cheers!

**COMMUNITY ACTION OVERNIGHT PARTNERSHIP**

(cont'd from p. 1) participants came to Big Hill Park for nature-based activities, team-building exercises, and the opportunity to camp out at Big Hill Center. These overnights exposed PREP students to the thrill of a camping experience; sleeping away from home, cooking over a campfire, hiking, learning about the ecology of Big Hill park, and also the preparation necessary to do all these activities. Welty staff presented the environmental education, while PREP staff chaperoned the students for the night.

This was an opportunity for the three organizations to experiment with organizing a cross-collaboration, with an outdoor experience at the core. While each partner brought valuable resources to the overnights, this project also supported each individual group's mission: Welty reached an underserved population that they usually only interact with on school field trips; Community Action was able to offer challenging, nature-based programming designed specifically for its clients; the City showcased its largest park and provided increased recreational opportunities for Beloit youth.

## BOARD PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE by Mark Spreitzer



After a busy summer, Welty turns its attention toward fall, and begins to prepare for 2019 as well. Welty has again been fortunate to have a great new group of board members that joined us in April, and committees have been meeting and working to plan programming and events, coordinate the restoration of the prairie at Big Hill Park, and raise the needed funds to keep Welty sustainable moving forward. Later this fall, we will begin our annual fall appeal, which raises the majority of the much-needed donations that help us pay our amazing staff while keeping our programming costs affordable for

families.

Fall will be a busy season for Welty, with field trips by 2nd and 4<sup>th</sup> grade classes, four sites for after school programming, prairie volunteer work days, and ongoing collaboration with the City of Beloit. We always need volunteers to help run programs, especially for field trips, so if you're around Beloit and able to volunteer this fall, whether helping with school groups or removing invasive species, please contact Welty and let us know.

As we look farther ahead to 2019, Welty is preparing for its 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary! The Welty Environmental Center officially received its non-profit status in September, 1999, so 2019 will be a yearlong anniversary celebration. Board and volunteer committees are already hard at work planning events, and we hope to find opportunities to reconnect with past members and supporters to reminisce and talk about ideas for the future over the coming year. In the meantime, let's all take some time to get out to Welty and Big Hill Park and enjoy the changing colors of fall.

### VISIT BELOIT J.E.T. GRANT FOR BIG HILL PARK SIGNAGE

In our ongoing efforts to optimize Welty's relocation to Big Hill Park, we received a \$9700 J.E.T. (Joint Effort in Tourism) grant from Visit Beloit to create a series of interpretive signs highlighting the natural and social history of the park.

We have hired Nancy Aten, of Landscapes of Place, to create the graphic design and guide the content development for the signs. Beloit College geology professor Jim Rougvie's First Year Initiative students will do research and write articles to be used on the signs, including such topics as: prairie restoration, birds of Big Hill Park, ski jump competitions, geologic features of the hill, Native American land use, and 1900s Big Hill Park days. The students will investigate both the College archives and the Beloit Historical Society for information and photographs. The City of Beloit is helping with costs for the physical signs and their installation, which we hope will occur in the late spring of 2019.



Left: Tug-of-War game at Big Hill Day picnic, 1911.



Right: View from top of ski jump, 1935.

### 2018-19 BOARD MEMBERS, CONT'D

**K. Forbeck:** I feel privileged to have this opportunity to be on the Welty Environmental Board of Directors, especially as the first teenager. During my freshman year, I realized I had a passion for the environment, so I spent most of the following summer volunteering to help out at camps through the WEC.

I have spent time in the great outdoors as long as I can remember, from enjoying time at my family cabin in the UP, going to summer camps at Beckman Mills when WEC was there, and even maple sugaring at Big Hill. Finding my passion in the outdoors motivated me to spend my 2018 spring semester at Conserve School, where I furthered my knowledge and stoked my passion for environmental education and conservation. I believe that connecting community, especially diverse groups of youth, to the outdoors is vital for the future of our world.

I am excited to join this talented group of people and see what we can do together.

## WELCOME TO OUR NEW 2018-19 BOARD MEMBERS

*The Warbler* asked our new board members to write brief introductions, which are shared below. In addition to our regular committees of Development, Program, Membership & Volunteer, Personnel, Finance, and Parks Interface, the board has added a Special Events & PR committee to help figure out how to celebrate Welty's 20th Anniversary. Non-board members are always welcome to serve on a committee, so please let us know if you are interested; it is a great way to get involved with Welty and support a specific area.

### HEIDI ANDRE

I have been a science teacher in the School District of Beloit for 30 years. 20 years ago I was approached by Fred Matthews and Dick Newsome who wondered if I could help provide programming for a new environmental center that they were starting in Beloit. I taught the first of many Ecobuddies programs out of the back of my van at Big Hill Park. I have been a board member almost all of this time, (except for the mandated exiles per board agreement). I was the recipient of the "Wisconsin Environmental Educator of the Year" in 2007 and have taught many student and teacher classes and workshops over the years. I am married to Richard and have two adult married sons. Sgt. Sam Andre and his wife Kendra are the parents of Oliver. Dr. Ethan Andre, DVM and his wife Jasmine are the parents of Leo.

### DAVE BENDLIN

... is a retired biology and environmental studies teacher at Milton schools for 33 years. After retirement he continues to teach field biology classes for Milton summer school and at UW Rock County College. David serves on the Board of directors for Rotary Botanical Gardens and serves as program and publicity chair Rock County Conservationists.

### KEN FORBECK

I am a 16-year-old Junior at Craig High School. I have lived in Beloit my whole life and enjoy outdoor recreation in many ways. My parents are Ann and Matt Forbeck, and I also have an older brother, Marty, and am part of a set of quadruplets, including Pat, Nick, Helen, and me. (cont'd p. 4)

### YAFFA GROSSMAN

I recently joined the Welty board, but I've been a supporter for many years. I am a botanist and professor the Beloit College Biology Department, Associate Dean of the College, and Director of the Liberal Arts in Practice Center. I enjoy working with students on many different types of projects from managing invasive species in the college's native species plantings, researching the effects of increased temperature on plant growth, and designing campus sustainability projects. I am looking forward to connecting Beloit College students, faculty, and staff with Welty's activities.

### ALICE LAMONT

Joining the Welty Center and becoming a Board member, too, all in the same evening was unexpected. Now that I've spent some time learning about the Center and all the wonderful things it affords, I wonder why I never got involved before. Big Hill Park was a huge attraction for me and my young family 47 years ago when we first came to Beloit. When our shores-of-Lake-Superior parents came to visit, Big Hill Park was one of the first things we showed them. The past five decades working as an accountant, educator, secretary, along with interests like the League of Women Voters have kept me from enjoying the beauty of this so-close-to-home respite. Always enjoying water, woods, and the wonders of nature, husband Phil and I look forward to showing our five grown children and six grandchildren what Big Hill Park and the Center have become. They, too, will be impressed.

### MISSY HENDERSON

I am a retired school social worker. My husband, Bill, and I have lived and worked in Beloit for over 40 years. We have 3 children and 6 grandchildren. Growing up I spent most of my days exploring the woods and a river near my home. I loved being outdoors and watching the changes in the environment that each season brought. My grandchildren have enjoyed much of these same activities at the Welty Summer Camps when they were held at Beckman Mill. Now that the Center has moved to Big Hill Park, I look forward to volunteering there and taking my grandchildren to the park and again exploring the grounds of this beautiful place. I was happy to be asked to be a board member.

### HARRY WIERSGALLA

Hello, I am a retired middle school science teacher, who continues to focus on environmental issues and enjoys working with kids. Serving on the WEC Board provides the opportunity for me to do both. My life's work as a teacher in area schools gives me the experience to work with young people as they participate in Welty's many educational programs. Born and raised in WI, I have lived in Beloit for 45 years, been married for 38 years, and have two grown children. I currently serve as the Charter Representative for Boy Scout Troop 608 in Beloit and am a committee member for the Beloit's Municipal Golf Committee. My pastimes are biking, golfing, and taking frequent road trips throughout the U.S. I look forward to serving on this board.