



THE WARBLER

The annual newsletter of the Friends of Welty
Environmental Center Fall, 2024 (Volume 24, Issue 1)

WELTY'S MISSION

To provide leadership in environmental education by equitably engaging the diverse residents of the Stateline region with activities that foster an appreciation of nature and promote environmental stewardship

2024-25 BOARD

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A NEW PLAN FOR WELTY PROGRAMS by Brenda Plakans, Executive Director

This has been a year of big changes...huge staff transitions (welcome to Elle Schraufnagel, Pam Garland-Gjestson, and Maddie Wendrick), exciting new projects (ARPA-funded 3-day 5th grade field trip planning), and expanded summer experiences (CareerTek academies and School District of Beloit summer school). All on top of our usual anchors: Sky's the Limit camp (for autistic teens), Big Hill summer camp, and ongoing field trips for area school groups. Thanks to our generous donors, we had our most successful summer appeal ever and secured matching grants to raise over \$47,000!



Meet Welty's full-time staff (l to r): Pam Garland-Gjestson (Prog. Mgr.); Brenda Plakans (Exec. Dir.); Maddie Wendrick (Prog. Mgr.); Elle Schraufnagel (Prog. Mgr.).

With our new staff hires this spring, our program department increased both its subject-matter and administrative expertise. When Darien Becker submitted her resignation for September (see p. 5), we had to think about how we would do a job search for that role and if we even still wanted a Program Director leading Educators. Our new hires are very talented and were already very collaborative as they settled into their positions. It seemed to me that a co-leadership model could be successful at Welty.

I worked with an ad hoc Board committee to create a new structure for our program department; three Program Managers would each be responsible for a different area—Field Trips, Camps, Career Tech Ed—but would share program delivery duties. In this model, no single manager is stuck with all the administrative tasks (invoicing, scheduling, hiring, planning). Instead of replacing Darien, we hired Maddie (see p. 4) to be the Camp Program Manager. She joins Pam as the Field Trip PM and Elle as the CTE PM.

We cleared the schedule at the beginning of September for a "Darien Download", and reviewed every Welty program, assigned duties, and defined job descriptions. Darien was able to overlap with Maddie, so we could truly hand off the management of the program department with ease. We rolled into fall field trips at the end of September, added a new weekly afterschool program at CareerTek, and have No School Day Camps on the calendar. This new structure is working swimmingly with each manager taking a lead in her area, but also helping her colleagues get organized.

I'm curious to see these roles expand and adapt to accommodate everyone who wants to work with Welty. Let me know if you're ever in the area and would like to see staff in action. The changes of the past year have been big, but they are making way for an exciting future!

HOW WE SPENT OUR SUMMER—AT CAMP!

by Pam Garland-Gjestson, Program Manager

We had another amazing summer camp at Welty consisting five full weeks running the last week of July through August. We served sixty different campers aged 7-12. Our last two weeks of camp each had forty campers registered! Each week had a unique theme. During “Animal Architecture” week the campers built their own structures in the woods, made bee hotels, birds’ nests and termite cathedrals! For “Screen to Green” week, Welty campers took a special field trip to Beckman Mill to go fishing as an homage to the game Animal Crossing. We had a few catches, including one by a first time fisher! Campers baked fresh bread and made butter to enjoy for snacks during “Farm to Table” week. Campers even got to milk a cardboard cow! The week also included learning about plant parts and most impressively, extracting DNA from strawberries.



Welty camp runs the 5 weeks of summer after SDB summer school ends. Our busiest weeks were the last two of August, when we hosted 40 campers for each session.

“Welty-Ology” week was made up of five different science-themed days including hydrology (water), paleontology (fossils), pedology (soil), zoology (animals), and dendrology (trees). Hydrology day included a wonderful field trip to Sweet-Allyn park for water science and critter discovery followed by an epic water balloon fight! “Camping and Outdoor Basics” was our final week’s theme. The campers’ favorite activity was—of course—learning to build a fire and making s’mores!

We had several college and high-school aged interns this spring and summer. They assisted with summer school programs, outreach programs and camp. Our BMHS interns spent the spring semester working on GLOBE research projects culminating in a trip to Ohio for a student research symposium! Our summer outreach intern traveled all over southern WI to provide programming at libraries and schools (see more about Helmi on p. 4).

2024 GRANT ROUNDUP

\$6,690	National Science Foundation	GEOPATHs grant (third year distribution)
\$10,000	Dave and Jean Bradford	Welty Outreach Intern (p.4 article about Helmi Kawsar)
\$25,000	City of Beloit ARPA grant	5th grade 3-day field trips (first year of two)
\$35,000	Hendricks Family Foundation	Second year of new Career Tech Ed position (Elle Schraufnagel)

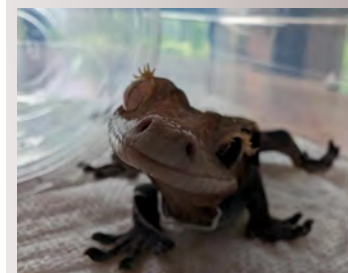
WELTY PROGRAM PIX



Welty hosted three BMHS GLOBE interns this spring, who presented research posters at the Toledo Zoo in May.



Merrill kindergarteners enjoyed an end-of-year nature day where they learned about how useful insects are and tried to catch pollinators to observe.



We partnered with J&R Aquatic Animal Rescue for another exotic pet rescue day, where the above crested gecko was surrendered.



Helmi and Ben, two of our summer interns, staffed a Farmer’s Market table and shared information in June.

MORE SUMMER SCENES



Teens came for a Citizen Science camp week, funded by our NSF grant.



We dissected owl pellets at the New Glarus Public Library.



During Animal Architecture week, campers built their own shelters using park materials.



Farm-to-Table campers made their own bread, butter, and ice cream.



Welty is back at Todd Timberwolf Time afterschool program for our 7th year!

ON BEYOND CAMP—SUMMER SCHOOL AND CAREERTEK ACADEMIES

by Elle Schraugnagel, Program Director

This summer, Welty was included in the School District of Beloit's summer school. For three weeks we brought environmental concepts to each building. The 3rd through 5th graders focused on water quality. They read stories, played games about contamination, and conducted water chemistry on our turtle tank. There was no shortage of dance moves while waiting for their test tablets to dissolve! From yeast fuel cells (chemical engineer) to levees (environmental engineer), the 6th through 8th graders explored eco-careers. A fan favorite for the older kids was building water wheels out of recyclable materials. Their goal was to get the most rotations per minute to generate the most electricity. The students really enjoyed experimenting with different sizes and numbers of turbines and, of course, getting them going with water.



Before our Welty summer day camps started, we partnered with Hendricks CareerTek to provide environmental summer academies. We hosted two weeks at the Center: Citizen Science camp and STEMInist camp.

CareerTek's STEMInist Camp helped girls to learn more about environmentally-themed careers and interact with female professionals from area businesses.

Citizen Science encompassed all of the spheres of the earth (hydrosphere, biosphere, pedosphere, and atmosphere). We took a group of teens (6th-10th grade) out to do field work where they literally got their hands dirty and fished in Goose Creek for macroinvertebrates.

The STEMInist camp served a group of young women who want to pursue a STEM field (Science/Tech/Engineering/Math). Not only were they able to learn more scientific methods, but were able to meet and chat with women currently working in STEM. We had guest speakers from TIGRIS (aquatic management services), Batteredman (civil engineering), and the Henry Vilas Zoo. At the end of the week we took a trip to Sweet Allyn Park, conducted water chemistry experiments, and waded in Turtle Creek for critters big and small.

Join Welty Environmental Center for an adult only

BIG HILL PARK BONFIRE

October 12 | 6-8 p.m. | Big Hill Park

LIVE MUSIC
CAMPFIRE SONGS & GAMES
S'MORES BAR
APPLE CIDER & DONUTS
B.Y.O PICNIC DINNER

\$10 IN ADVANCE
\$15 AT DOOR

Tickets: WeltyCenter.org

Register and pick a sing-along song at www.weltycenter.org

MEET MADDIE WENDRICK, OUR NEWEST STAFF MEMBER



Maddie played the role of an injured camper (with help from some ketchup) at our homeschool Outdoor Basics field trip.

Maddie grew up exploring the woods of Green Bay, WI - her hometown. She received her B.S in Biology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 2023. While attending university, she was in the UW Marching Band as a flügelhorn player and was a member of the Badger Band Sustainability Team.

In 2022, she worked at Aldo Leopold Nature Center as an Environmental Educator and Preschool Support Teacher. In the spring of 2024, she became an Environmental Educator and Attendant at the Lussier Family Heritage Center.

Maddie has a huge passion for outdoor education and unstructured nature play, especially when she gets to share this passion with children! She absolutely loves what she does and cannot envision herself doing anything else.

When Maddie isn't playing alongside the kids or spitting out all the cool nature facts, she would most likely be found with her pets and her partner; hiking, fishing, birding, reading, gardening... the list goes on!

REFLECTIONS FROM HELMI KAWSAR, OUR SUMMER OUTREACH INTERN

My work as an outreach educator was to craft environmental programs for kids and deliver them. I prepared programs on a variety of topics including cicadas, plants, insects, and moths, and presented them in public libraries around the area. I also worked regularly with elementary school kids in the Summer After School program where I developed fun educational activities, such as: camouflage games, learning about buoyancy, and making tiny explosions while learning about acids and bases. In addition to that, I represented Welty at the Beloit Farmer's Market, Nygren Wetland Preserve, and Move Beloit.

I also assisted with camps. One memorable experience has been helping with Sky's The Limit Camp, a STEM Camp catered to neurodivergent kids, organized by Michael Notaro from UW-Madison. I have also assisted with Welty camps and the love I have received from the kids has been immeasurable. From playing chess with them to the kids making bracelets for me, I will always cherish these memories. I have also assisted at Nature At The Confluence with Rockford Summer School programs, teaching about water pollution and watersheds, taking kids on trails, and playing team-building activities.

My supervisor at Welty, Darien Becker, has mentored me, given me feedback, helped me in developing programs, and has always been kind and encouraging like a backbone. I also got the privilege of working with Pamela Garland-Gjestson and Elle Schraufnagel who have been extremely nice and benevolent throughout the summer providing feedback and helping me draft programs. I have learned a lot from my experience working here, and this has opened a door to whole new possibilities for my future endeavors.



Helmi Kawsar (center) spent the summer as our Outreach Intern. She is a sophomore at Beloit College, majoring in biochemistry and quantitative economics.

REFLECTIONS ON THE PAST THREE YEARS by Darien Becker, Program Director



Photos (left to right, top to bottom): Laura the Bee Lady attended camp with her mobile hive; Mariela, Aaron, Oliver, and Darien testing out BugZookas; last day of Todd Timberwolf Time in 2022; 2024 camp training with Chance, Emily, Esther, Elle, Pam, Liv, and Darien; 2022 camp field trip to Rotary Botanical Garden; Helmi and Darien at NLI Family Adventure Days; Beckman Mill Park fishing day; sifting wetland soil for insects with 2023 STEMInist campers; Hedwig and Darien at the New Glarus Public Library; GLOBE Citizen Science Camp in 2023; Brenda and Darien at the UW-Madison Women and Leadership Symposium; last day of Todd Timberwolf Time in 2023; last day of 2024 summer camp; macroinvertebrate program at Waterford Public Library; "Mrs. Darien! We found snapping turtles!"; Waterford Public Library turtle program; Campers learned the hard way that oak leaves don't taste very good; Welty's first cohort of Wisconsin Master Naturalists; Welty program staff, March 2024.

(September 13 was Darien's last day at Welty as our Program Director before moving to River Fall, WI with her family. We asked her to reflect on her time with the organization since June, 2021, when she joined the staff as an Educator.)

If you had asked me three years ago what the definition of a "successful program" was, I'd say something about the number of chairs filled or the amount of money raised. Ask me now and I'd say the most important thing about any program is the impact: the passion that is ignited, the curiosity that is fueled, the memories that are made, and the stories that are told. Since my first day at Welty, we have had over 30,000 engagements with youth and adults in the Stateline area through various public events, expos, field trips, and camps. I am so proud to say that I helped make that happen, and I'll tell you right now that each and every program had an impact on someone, especially when it came to third-graders drinking sap straight from a maple tree or 4K learners meeting a turtle for the first time.

Working at Welty has given me a unique opportunity to guide learners through new experiences. I can't tell you how many hands I've held through the forest for the first time or how many high school learners I've led through deer paths in the prairie—all for the cause of exploration! I wouldn't change the time I spent with Welty for the world. The staff and teachers in the Stateline region are wonderful people, and the children are sometimes downright hilarious! One of the things I'll miss about field trip season is standing at the program room door, watching as learners' faces light up with recognition as they come around the corner on the sidewalk, exclaiming "I'VE BEEN HERE BEFORE! I REMEMBER YOU!"

I can't thank my colleagues at Welty enough for supporting me in project development and being overall good friends. I thank the Board of Directors for continuing to support the organization by being a sounding board for public programs and improving the organization. Lastly, I thank all the Friends of Welty Environmental Center for seeing a cause worth supporting. It really is a special place that touches so many, including me.

There are so many things coming down the pike that will continue to make Welty better for what it is set out to do—serving the Stateline community and providing opportunities for nature education—and I cannot wait to see them happen.

WELTY ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER



1201 Big Hill Court Beloit, WI 53511

TO:

----- Detach and send to FWEC 1201 Big Hill Ct. Beloit, WI 53511 -----



I want to provide support for Welty Environmental Center's operations! Welty has 501 (c)(3) tax-exempt status and is solely a private, non-profit educational organization. Dues and contributions may be tax-deductible. Please accept my gift to continue these important environmental education efforts in the Stateline area.

Name(s) _____

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Please accept my one-time annual gift:

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