



BACKYARD NATURE CENTER

Winter 2016 Newsletter

Special events this season

We celebrated the Forest Preserves of Cook County's Centennial



A total of 168 students and community members, including students and teachers from the Shedd Aquarium, joined us for a day of outdoor fun and education at Erickson Woods Forest Preserve in September. BYNC was excited to put on the event as part of the 100 Years/100 Events Forest Preserves of Cook County centennial celebration, and the day featured activities for all ages. Bird expert Geoff Williamson led bird walks, while children enjoyed a Nature Play Area and a StoryWalk® consisting of pages from a children's book mounted around the picnic grove. Participants learned about tree identification, animal tracks and pelts, and even helped clear some invasive Buckthorn. A special thanks to event leader Gary Morrissey! We also greatly appreciate the time and expertise of volunteers Dave Kosnik, Len Strauch, Bob Rudis, Diane Greening, John Levine, Susan Lord, and Brittany Davis, as well as Board Members Daniel Kielson, Linn Carey and Katie Keller.

We enjoyed connecting our community to service and fun in the Skokie Lagoons



In November, we were delighted to facilitate a nature hike in the Lagoons for the New Foundations Center, an organization that helps adults with mental disabilities pursue lives of meaning and purpose. Restoration events led by BYNC members and Forest Preserve Stewards Daniel Kielson and Gary Morrissey saw great community support. In November, families and scout groups attended a day organized by the Winnetka Park District. Troop leaders and Brownie Scouts from Greeley School helped clear Buckthorn and enjoyed s'mores in December. In January, LL Bean volunteers, as well as a hiking group, joined the effort and made additional progress clearing the Lagoons of invasive plants.

We continue to bring students experiential learning outside the classroom



Wilmette Junior High School classes visited the Skokie Lagoons in October to learn about water quality and environmental history. Over four days, more than 500 students visited stations with BYNC volunteers to learn about the creation of the Lagoons, the reversal of the Chicago River, invasive species, and animals of the Lagoons. Teachers led students as they performed water quality testing, collecting various data. This year, students explored an additional indicator of water quality when they used microscopes to examine macroinvertebrates. We look forward to exploring the Lagoons with more students through our continuing partnership with Wilmette Junior High School and other local schools!

We helped develop a preschool Nature Play Area



Northfield Community Nursery School (NFCNS) received a donation last spring, and they were inspired to create an outdoor, nature-oriented play space. After NFCNS board president Erica Marinello and her family saw our play space at an The Alliance for Early Childhood event, the preschool reached out to BYNC and the Alliance for input on designing the NFCNS Nature Play Area. We collaborated with the teachers and parents to develop a plan. "Gary's well-thought-out plan gave us the kickstart we needed to turn our ideas into something concrete," says NFCNS director Heather Burns. "Knowing that we had the support of the BYNC and the Alliance gave us a boost of confidence as we took on a project outside our personal know-how and experience." The project resulted in a play area that encourages imaginative, cooperative play with rocks and sticks, dirt and water – key components in a child's connection to the natural world.

We are excited to announce that Daniel and Heather will be leading a workshop at the Chicago Botanic Garden for early childhood educators on May 4th, entitled: The Ins and Outs of Creating a Nature-Based Play Space in Your Community. To find additional information and register for the seminar, "Inspiring Nature Play: Climbing Higher," visit http://www.chicagobotanic.org/education/teacher_programs/inspiring_nature_play_climbing_higher

We had fun at Winter Play Day



BYNC created a nature play space for The Alliance for Early Childhood Winter Play Day in January. The children who visited Crow Island Woods enjoyed making paths out of large and small “tree cookies,” playing on tree swings, and building a teepee. About 150 adults and children explored the play space, and went on a nature hike and scavenger hunt. The most popular activities were roasting marshmallows over a fire, and splashing around in icy puddles! We enjoyed working with our friends at Emily Oaks Nature Center and the Chicago Botanic Garden to present the day’s events.

We welcome our new board member John Levine

We are excited to welcome John Levine to our board. John brings diverse professional skills and volunteer experience to BYNC. He has held leadership positions in marketing management in the consumer products industry, and founded a consulting practice in marketing and new product development. He also writes novels for children. Following his passion for nature, he has volunteered with The Nature Conservancy, Lincoln Park Zoo, and other local environmental organizations. John is already making an impact with BYNC using his marketing and organizational skills to focus our short and long-term planning.



_____ Special thanks to Will Carey for volunteering _____
his time for the writing of this publication.

BackYard Nature Center –

Connecting children and adults with the wonders of nature

www.backyardnaturecenter.org