



Upper Cape Cod Regional Technical School students pitch in at the new Hidden Hollow Nature Discovery Center

Nature Discovery Flourishes at Heritage Museums & Gardens

by Tobey Eugenio

Since 1969, Heritage Museums & Gardens has been delighting visitors with a wide variety of unique experiences. One aspect of Heritage Museums & Gardens' mission focuses on the stewardship of our horticultural collection by connecting people and our living collections.

The Heritage staff has been working hard to uphold and infuse these values in one of our newest projects – Hidden Hollow: A Nature Discovery Center.

Work on Hidden Hollow began back in 2006, when strategic planning work identified the gardens as the greatest under-utilized asset at Heritage. A team began investigating new and innovative ways to address this finding.

The vision of Hidden Hollow arose from a clear commitment to meet our mission and to serve our constituencies in the best manner possible.

Hidden Hollow is being built in a two-acre glacially-formed kettle hole in the middle of the Heritage grounds. The site creates a safe, secure, tree-surrounded space for playing and learning.

The focus of the space will be to provide meaningful experiences for all ages, promoting appreciation for the natural world through exploration and discovery.

RECONNECT CHILDREN WITH NATURE

Research shows that children today are no longer able to spend long, unstructured hours outdoors creating bonds with nature. Research also shows that children benefit greatly from experiencing the natural world as a regular part of their healthy growth and development.

These benefits have a lasting impact, especially when positive outdoor experiences come at an early age.

The framework for Hidden Hollow is based on Nature Explore Classroom (NEC), a nationally recognized movement guided by the work of The Arbor Day Foundation and Dimensions Educational Research Foundation.

Designed for families with children ages 2-10, this new space will feature several delineated activity areas that will encourage families to play, learn and enjoy nature together. Block building, gardening, sand play, fort building, nature art, dancing, musical play, balance beams and stepping stumps made of recycled trees are just a few of the elements enclosed in our nature inspired space.

The focus on low-tech natural materials and emphasis on a range of multi-disciplinary experiences and free-choice engagement were a perfect fit to our own philosophy. We recognized NEC as an ideal model, and appreciate that it is based on extensive research, contributions from experts in a variety of areas and years of field testing.

We're aiming to make Hidden Hollow one of New England's first certified NEC's, and hope to be recognized for our commitment to connecting children to the natural world.

WORKING TOGETHER TO REALIZE THE DREAM

Many partners are helping us realize our dream. The construction of Hidden Hollow has been made possible by the Foundation for the Future major gifts campaign, and generous financial support from The Institutes of Museums and Library Services and Jane's Trust are enabling the development of a range of related educational programs.

Design support was provided by the Horsley Witten Group, a local environmental science and engineering firm and by landscape architect, Ted Deirker.

Eagle Scout Zach DeLong, of Yarmouth, contributed amphitheater-style seating to complement a 24-foot stage built by students from the Upper Cape Cod Regional Technical School. These students contributed other carpentry projects as well, and continue their work on a two-story tree house overlooking Hidden Hollow slated to open in 2011.

Horticulture students from Upper Cape Regional Technical School have also joined our team to help with walkway, gardening, and landscape work.

Heritage staff and Upper Cape Cod Regional Tech faculty are dedicated to growing a partnership that infuses authentic curriculum experiences with rich hands-on opportunities for all that are involved in our Hidden Hollow project.

Recently, our Hidden Hollow team worked side by side with AmeriCorps Cape Cod to ready our space for the final phase of element placement and plantings.

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Beyond the physical aspects of Hidden Hollow, our team has been working hard to be at the forefront of the national movement to reconnect children-and their adults-with nature. We've presented workshops sharing our vision with local stakeholders and have begun developing collaborations with local early childhood educators, colleges, museums and public gardens.

A variety of unique program experiences will be offered in Hidden Hollow, from drop-in activities for daily museum visitors to scheduled programs for family, school and community groups to workshops for parents and teachers.

Devoted to spreading our nature message to all of Cape Cod and Southeastern MA, we've begun a 3-year plan that involves teacher trainings, institutes, forums, internships, and collaborations with local schools, museums and public gardens.

DREAMS BECOME REALITY

Dreams will become a reality as work continues into the early summer, with hopes of opening Hidden Hollow in the summer of 2010.

In addition to Hidden Hollow, Heritage Museums & Gardens offers a wide variety of interesting and unique experiences for visitors, from its vast array of Dexter Rhododendrons to the rest of the beautifully landscaped gardens and grounds.

A Shaker-style round barn houses the J. K. Lilly III Antique Automobile Collection, while the American History Museum holds an impressive collection of military miniatures, antique firearms, and the distinctive bird carvings of master carvers.

Visitors can ride on the Art Museum's hand-carved antique carousel and view the distinguished works of early American folk art.

If you have a passion for nature discovery and have an interest in joining our Hidden Hollow team as a volunteer, artist, performer, storyteller, block builder or advocate please contact Tobey Eugenio, Environmental Education Specialist Heritage Museums & Gardens at:

508.888.3300, x 158 or teugenio@heritagemuseums.org





Tobey Eugenio works as an Environmental Education Specialist at Heritage Museums & Gardens.

Her dream job entails working as the lead learner in Hidden Hollow: A Nature Discovery Center, where she will get to spend her days designing curriculum and working outside with children, families, and school groups.

She lives in Middleboro with her husband and two beautiful daughters.

In addition to her strong connection to nature, Tobey spends her time creating art, teaching, volunteering and enjoying her family and friends.