



Crossroads
at Big Creek
LEARNING CENTER NATURE PRESERVE

Celebrating 25 Years of Learning!

*Students enjoy learning
in 'awesome' outdoor classroom*

CROSSROADS NEWSLETTER

VOL. 24, ISSUE 1 - SPRING 2026

A Note from the Director

The Crossroads at Big Creek community is truly remarkable! Looking back, it's inspiring to see how far we've come—from our beginnings in 2001 as Sturgeon Bay's School Forest, to becoming a stand-alone nonprofit in 2003 supported entirely by the generosity and dedication of our community. Everything Crossroads has become, and everything it offers today, exists because of the vision of our founders and the ongoing support of countless community members who believe in this place.

This summer brings two milestones worth celebrating, the 25th birthday of the Collins Learning Center and the retirement of our founding director—and original School Forest employee—Coggin Heeringa.

Each represents a legacy of dedication, stewardship, and learning. The success of Crossroads is rooted in the efforts of everyone who came before us—those who built a strong foundation—and continues to grow thanks to our committed community members, board, staff, volunteers, and visitors who shape Crossroads every day.

As we look ahead, we invite you to join us this summer in honoring these milestones. Together, we will continue working to meet our community's needs through collaboration, meaningful programming, and access to the natural world we all cherish.

Thank you for being part of the Crossroads story—past, present, and future.

Samantha Koyen, Executive Director



Welcome

Crossroads at Big Creek is thrilled to welcome new members to our board and staff! Their passion and expertise will help shape our mission and guide the impactful projects we undertake.



Tammie Grossman—Board Member

Tammie earned her law degree from DePaul University and spent 35 years in community economic development at state and federal levels. After retiring to Door County, she enjoys hiking at Crossroads with her granddaughters and volunteering with local nonprofits. She looks forward to supporting conservation here in our local community.

Trent Snyder—Board Member

A Door County native, Trent holds education degrees from the University of Minnesota–Moorhead and Hamline University. He returned home in 2018 seeking a more connected life and soon partnered with Jason Estes to grow Bridge Up Brewing, where he is Head Brewer. Trent, his wife Amanda, and their daughters are grateful to call Door County home.



Anika Gerl—Environmental Stewardship and Outreach Intern

Anika is originally from Green Bay and will be entering her senior year at Northern Michigan University, where she is majoring in environmental studies and sustainability, with a minor in outdoor recreation and leisure.

Julia Spainhour—Environmental Stewardship and Outreach Intern

Julia is a recent graduate of the University of Illinois, where she studied Natural Resources & Environmental Sciences. She spent much of her college experience engaging in environmental education and research.



See You on the Trails

Crossroads is grateful to the board members whose terms have ended and staff members who are retiring. We're grateful for their dedication to our mission and look forward to seeing them as volunteers, program participants, or trail users. If you see them, please share your appreciation for their commitment to our community.



Jason Feldman—Board Member

Jason Feldman has served on the Crossroads at Big Creek Board since 2019, championing restoration efforts and diverse educational programs. A UW–Stevens Point graduate with further study in Landscape Design at the University of Minnesota, he owns Jason Feldman Landscaping and is a dedicated Door County local. Jason and his wife, Holly, have raised their three children here. We look forward to Jason continuing to champion conservation in our community.

Coggin Herringa — Founding Director and Interpretive Naturalist

Crossroads is forever grateful for the commitment and dedication Coggin has given to establish Crossroads for the community. She was the founding executive director when Crossroads was originally the School Forest and stepped down from the role of director to interpretive naturalist in 2021. For more information about her legacy, please see page 5.



Crossroads at Big Creek inspires environmental stewardship in learners of all ages and from all backgrounds through education, research, land restoration, and outdoor experiences.

Crossroads is a 501(c)(3) non-profit. Donations are tax deductible as allowed by law. EIN 05-0560158

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Samantha Koyen
Executive Director



Coggin Herringa
Interpretive Naturalist



Lynn Michelsen
Business Manager



Nick Lutzke
Land & Facilities Manager

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Join us for the 17th Annual Crossroads Trail Run!

Crossroads at Big Creek invites runners and walkers of all ages on **Saturday, June 13**, to choose a **2k, 5k, or 10k** distance in a non-competitive staggered start at **8:00 am** near the Collins Learning Center. All routes will be

clearly marked and posted for your convenience.

To receive a commemorative event T-shirt, register by **May 12** for just \$30 (save \$10!). The event is free for ages 1-7 and 70+, and \$15 for ages 8-14.

Scan QR code or visit CrossroadsRun.com. **All proceeds support mission and programs of Crossroads.** (Our Trail Run thrives thanks to our dedicated volunteers! If you'd like to help, please sign up at TrackItForward.com.)



This event welcomes all ages and all experience levels—a perfect outdoor activity for individuals, families, and community groups alike. We look forward to seeing you on the trails!



TRAILS & ALES Trails & Ales Returns With More Breweries!

Crossroads at Big Creek

Crossroads at Big Creek is once again partnering with all eight Door County breweries—plus the three Kewaunee County breweries—to create a special Ale Trail for our third annual fundraising event on **Saturday, September 12**, from **noon–3:30 PM**.

During the event, guests can purchase raffle tickets for a chance to win brewery-themed and Door County-themed prizes. **All proceeds from Trails & Ales support Crossroads' programming, stewardship efforts, and community outreach.** Trails & Ales will be held rain or shine. If trail conditions become unsafe due to weather, the event will move to the grounds in and around the Collins Learning Center.

Early bird tickets are available now for \$30 plus tax. Tickets will be \$40 plus tax on the day of the event. Scan QR code or visit ticketsignup.io/TicketEvent/TrailsandAles. Join us for an afternoon of great local brews, community, and support for the Crossroads mission!



Congratulations to Our Facebook Winter Photo Contest Winner – Allison Deutsch

Thank you to everyone who submitted photos and cast votes—your participation made this contest a beautiful celebration of nature, creativity, and community at Crossroads at Big Creek. Allison's photo received the most votes during our winter photography contest, she was up against stiff competition with Ashley Jodarski coming in second and Kaitlynn Heath placing third.

Keep an eye out for our Spring Photo Contest starting May 5!





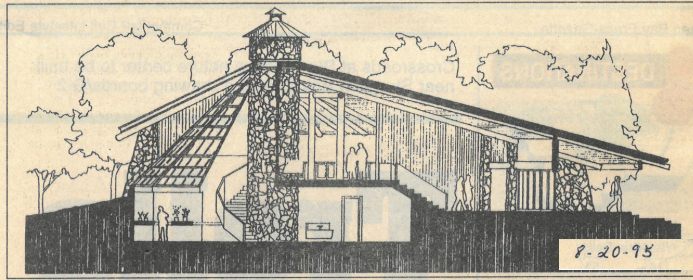
Crossroads focuses on environment

By Dan Hyde

Press-Gazette Correspondent

In just four years, Crossroads at Big Creek has begun to reap rewards as a multiuse learning facility. The project was started in 1991 by the Sturgeon Bay Education Foundation to educate about Door County's ecological and historical significance.

A learning center for all



Celebrating 25 Years of Learning & Community

by Samantha Koyen

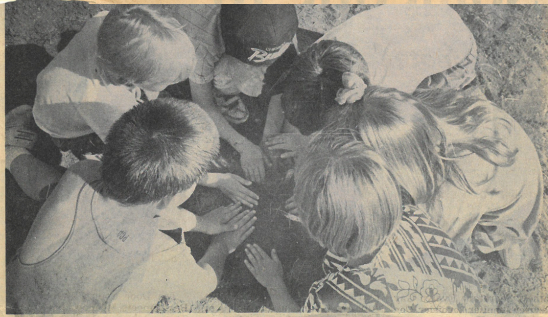
This year marks a meaningful milestone for our community: 25 years since the Collins Learning Center was built. In 2001, the Sturgeon Bay Education Foundation recognized the importance of environmental education and took a bold step by building a dedicated home for their School Forest program. Prior to construction, the land—acquired in 1992—had been used by science teachers, PE instructors, and other educators to give students hands-on outdoor learning experiences.

Sturgeon Bay teachers investing in Crossroads



Students enjoy learning in 'awesome' outdoor classroom

Crossroads Little People on the Prairie



Many hands made for short work as Sunrise School first graders, from left, Daniel Lara, Andy Michaud, Mike Schmidt, Joshua Pelc,

Emily Cole and Maren Larsen planted peat pots as part of the prairie project at Crossroads at Big Creek.

6-21-94

As the value of getting students into nature became increasingly clear, the community came together to support the creation of a public Learning Center. Just two years after construction began, the District saw the need for a nonprofit organization that could offer free environmental education for all. In 2003, Crossroads at Big Creek was officially formed with the mission to inspire environmental stewardship for everyone.

Since then, Crossroads has relied almost entirely on private donations to acquire new properties, restore ecosystems, enhance trails, and offer high-quality programs for learners of all ages. As Superintendent Dan Tjernagel has shared, "Crossroads plays an important role in our students' experiences, development, and understanding of the natural world.

We are proud to have been part of the establishment of such an important cornerstone in our community and look forward to the next 25 years."

Thanks to the dedication of early supporters, charter members, and the Door County community, Crossroads now welcomes more than 11,000 people annually to its programs and partners with more than 30 organizations. Groups such as Learning in Retirement, the Boys & Girls Club of Door County, and Doorway to Learning Child Care Center make regular use of our preserves and facilities. "The weekly outings to Crossroads have become something our children truly look forward to, and the impact goes far beyond the classroom," notes Michelle Jacobson, executive director of Doorway to Learning. "These experiences are enriching their education, broadening their world, and adding real value to their lives."

To honor this 25-year milestone and inspire continued support, Jim and Cathy Collins—longtime community members and champions of Crossroads—have announced a public \$25,000 matching challenge. They will match every dollar donated, up to \$25,000. "Crossroads serves everyone," Jim Collins shared. "Being connected to such an important part of our community is an honor. We're proud to be part of a community that believes in accessible learning and environmental stewardship. The Learning Center has grown tremendously over the past 25 years, and we're excited to be part of inspiring environmental curiosity for another 25 more."



Carl Cochrane George Pinney Jim Maki
Beginning of Parking Lot Project



One of the first groups of students to work at Crossroads - 1992

Planting Seeds for the Future: Celebrating Coggin Heeringa's Legacy

by Samantha Koyen

Buffalo stampede



"Buffalo" stamped prairie grass seed into the ground at Crossroads at Big Creek, Sturgeon Bay Schools' Historical and Environmental Learning Preserve. Staying faithful to Pioneer times when real buffalo hooves stamped seeds into the soil, naturalist Coggin Heeringa encouraged elementary city children to pretend they were buffalo and stomp seed into the earth.

—Advocate photos by Cheri Harris

Walking the trails of Crossroads, like most people, I'm drawn to the bridges that span Big Creek. But the place that always—without a shadow of a doubt—takes my breath away is the wild flower meadow just beyond Pikes Passage Bridge.

Rich with a diversity of forbs (flowering plants) and grasses, the area transforms with the seasons. In the early morning dew of summer, the field becomes a sea of purple as Ohio spiderwort (*Tradescantia ohiensis*) blooms. By midday, the flowers close, and later in the season the landscape fills with asters and swaying prairie coneflowers (*Ratibida pinnata*). The air carries the scent of warm earth and herbal bee balm—a sensory experience that feels both grounding and awe-inspiring.

When I first stumbled upon this slice of perfection, I shared my excitement with Coggin. In response, she told me the story of what we now lovingly call the "Buffalo Prairie." She had long dreamed of planting a prairie but recognized a challenge: we lacked the large herbivores that historically helped establish and maintain these ecosystems. True to form, Coggin came up with a creative—and delightfully unconventional—solution. She invited students to scatter seeds on the hillside, then encouraged them to run and "stampede" like buffalo. As she recounted the story, I couldn't help but laugh.

In true Coggin fashion, she blended lifelong learning with curiosity, creativity, and a sense of play. The result is what I would argue is one of the most successful and beautiful prairie plantings I've ever seen.

If you ask Coggin, she might say her legacy is Crossroads. But after getting to know her and witnessing the impact she has had across Door County, it's clear that her influence extends far beyond any single place. While she devoted much of her professional career to Crossroads and to the students of Door County, she also gave her time and talents to teaching environmental education at Interlochen each summer, serving with numerous nonprofits and clubs, and generously sharing her knowledge with anyone eager to learn.

Working alongside Coggin over the past few years has been a gift. Watching how she connects with people—always ready to inspire, encourage, and educate—has been one of the greatest learning experiences of my own career.

Crossroads and the Door County community are forever grateful for all that Coggin has given throughout her professional life. As she steps into retirement, we wish her the very best and look forward to hearing about her next adventures when she returns to visit—between her continued volunteering and teaching, of course.



Summer Programming Sneak Peek



NEW!



Have you ever stopped to wonder how bees survive the long, cold winter—or why dragonflies rank among the most successful insect predators on the planet? This summer, Crossroads invites curious minds of all ages to explore these fascinating questions and many more through a lively weekly environmental series for all ages.

Each week a new environmental theme awaits—inviting curiosity, creativity, and connection through stories, hands-on exploration, and guided adventures. The week kicks off Mondays with the release of a new **Trail Tale**, featuring thoughtfully selected children's books that introduce the week's topic. Participants begin at the west trailhead at their convenience and follow the story as it unfolds along the trail. Later that day, **at 2:00 p.m.**, curious minds can gather outdoors in front of the Collins Learning Center, where **Door County Librarian Beth Lokken** brings the stories to life through engaging read-alouds that blend literature and nature. Featured books will be available to borrow following their designated week, inviting families to continue the learning at home.

All week long, visitors can stop by the **Collins Learning Center during open hours** to explore self-guided **Tinkers**. These interactive, hands-on activities encourage curiosity and independent exploration, allowing learners to engage with each topic at their own pace.

During **Journeys with Joan** on **Tuesdays at 1:00 p.m.**, **Naturalist Joan Wilke** will lead family-friendly presentations that build upon the week's theme. These lively talks—even approachable for younger audiences—offer fascinating insights into the remarkable processes and creatures that shape our natural environment.

The week wraps up on **Thursdays at 2:00 p.m. with Talks**, a deeper-dive program led by a specialist from the **community** geared toward adult learners. These sessions may include guided hikes, hands-on activities, or in-depth lectures, offering a richer understanding of the topic and meaningful ways to engage with the natural environment.

With something to enjoy at every age, this summer learning series invites the entire community to slow down, look closer, and cultivate a deeper appreciation for the natural world—all while learning something new along the way. Visit [Summer at Crossroads](#) to learn more.



MAY 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
				1	2 10am Mayday!	3
4 1:30pm Guided Hike: Big Creek	5 1:30pm Lasers & Lightsabers with Brian Lindow	6 10am Junior Nature Club (JNC) 1:30pm Wandering Wednesday	7 3:30pm Macroinvertebrates	8	9 6:30am Global Big Day Bird Hike at the Cove 10am Tree Planting	10 Collins Learning Center Closed, Trails are Open!
11 6am Birding in the Field Breakfast at the Cove (Please RSVP.) 1:30pm DCMGA: Shade Gardens	12	13 10am JNC 1:30pm Wandering Wednesday	14 3:30pm Bud Burst	15 Collins Learning Center & Main Trail Closed 7am-1pm for a Special Event	16 9am-12pm Discovery Day: Celebrating 25 Years of Learning	17
18 1:30pm Guided Hike: Ida Bay at Ida Bay	19 5:30pm Door Co Beekeepers Club: Mite Treatment	20 1:30pm Wandering Wednesday World Bee Day	21 3:30pm Water Currents	22	23 Collins Learning Center Closed, Trails are Open!	24
25 Collins Learning Center Closed, Trails are Open!	26	27 1:30pm Wandering Wednesday	28 3:30pm Wildlife Services	29	30 10am Pollen Probe	31

Events take place at the Collins Learning Center unless stated otherwise. Some outdoor programs may be rescheduled or canceled due to weather. For more details, new programs, and changes, please scan QR code or visit us at www.crossroadsatbigcreek.org.

All programs are open to the public and free thanks to our supporters!



Trail Tales: Self-guided hike starting at the west trailhead where a story unfolds along the trail.

Tinkers: Ever-changing self-led hands-on activities. Stop in during Learning Center open hours.

Tales: Door Co Librarian Beth Lokken reads the weekly Trail Tale.

Talks: A specialist brings each weekly them to life.



Science Saturdays: Family programs centered around interactive activities.



Journeys with Joan: Summer nature exploration.



Family Interactive Program/ All Ages Welcome!

JUNE 2026

WEEKLY THEMES & TRAIL TALES	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
Summer Kick Off The Hike Alison Farrell	1	2	3 1:30pm Wandering Wednesday Guided Hikes	4 8:30pm Ida Bay Bat Survey at Ida Bay (Please RSVP.)	5 9:30am WDNR Rare Plant Monitoring (Please RSVP.)	6 10am Pollution
Dragonflies Are You a Dragonfly? Judy Allen	8 2pm Tale	9	10 1:30pm Wandering Wednesday	11 2pm Dragonfly Identification & Lifecycles Mike Grimm, The Nature Conservancy	12 5am Ida Bay Bird Survey Hike at Ida Bay	13 8am 17th Annual Crossroads Trail Run
Bees The Bumble Bee Queen April Pulley Sayre	15 2pm Tale	16 1pm Journeys with Joan: Insect Safari	17 1:30pm Wandering Wednesday	18 2pm Native & Non-Native Bees Door County Beekeepers Club 8:30pm Ida Bay Bat Survey at Ida Bay (RSVP)	19	20 10am Flag Day Hike
Water Creekfinding Jacqueline Briggs Martin	22 2pm Tale	23 1pm Journeys with Joan: Glaciers to Great Lakes	24 1:30pm Wandering Wednesday	25 2pm Water in a Karst System Amanda Surfus, DC Soil & Water	26 5am Ida Bay Bird Survey Hike at Ida Bay	27 Collins Learning Center Closed, Trails are Open!
Creek Creatures Over and Under the Pond Kate Messner	29 2pm Tale	30 1pm Journeys with Joan: Great Lakes Fisheries	COLLINS LEARNING CENTER CLOSED ON SUNDAYS (AND SATURDAYS STARTING JUNE 28). TRAILS ARE OPEN 24/7 AT NO CHARGE!			

JULY 2026

WEEKLY THEMES & TRAIL TALES	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI
Creek Creatures Over and Under the Pond Kate Messner			1 1:30pm Wandering Wednesday Guided Hikes	2 2pm Creek Macros Gretchen Schmelzer, WAV 8:30pm Ida Bay Bat Survey at Ida Bay (RSVP)	3 Collins Learning Center Closed, Trails are Open!
Birds The Birdwatchers Simon James	6 2pm Tale	7 1pm Journeys with Joan: Fantastic Flyers 6pm UWO ERIC Labs: Well Monitoring Results	8 1:30pm Wandering Wednesday	9 2pm Breeding Bird Behavior Paige Witek, Door County Land Trust	10 5am Ida Bay Bird Survey Hike at Ida Bay
Butterflies The Amazing Life Cycle of Butterflies Kay Barnham	13 2pm Tale	14 1pm Journeys with Joan: Butterflies	15 1:30pm Wandering Wednesday	16 2pm Designing a Butterfly Garden Karen Newbern, Nursery Manager at Door Landscape & Nursery	17
Mammals The Busy Tree Jennifer Ward	20 2pm Tale	21 1pm Journeys with Joan: Butterflies 5:30pm Door County Beekeepers: Hive Dive	22 1:30pm Wandering Wednesday	23 2pm Mammal Adaptations Wisconsin DNR Warden Chris Kratcha	SAT, JULY 25 1pm Mushroom Club: Mushroom Cooking 101
Geology When You Find the Right Rock Mary Lyn Ray	27 2pm Tale	28 1pm Journeys with Joan: Rocks & Caves of Door County	29 1:30pm Wandering Wednesday	30 2pm Geology 101 Learning Rocks! Brian Forrest, Door Co Land Trust	31

AUGUST 2026

WEEKLY THEMES & TRAIL TALES	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
Geology When You Find the Right Rock Mary Lyn Ray						1
Mushrooms Mushrooms Know Kallie George	3 2pm Tale	4 1pm Journeys with Joan: Glaciers to Great Lakes	5 1:30pm Wandering Wednesday Guided Hikes	6 2pm Mushrooms Mike Marit, Door Peninsula Mushroom Club	7	8
Plants Plants Can't Sit Still Rebecca Hirsch	10 2pm Tale	11 1pm Journeys with Joan: Finding Fossils	12 1:30pm Wandering Wednesday	13 2pm Heritage Garden Dina Boettcher & Ruth Watson, DCMGA	14	15
Fossils Curious About Fossils Kate Waters	17 2pm Tale	18 1pm Journeys with Joan: Finding Fossils	19 1:30pm Wandering Wednesday	20 2pm Ancient Silurian Seas (Fossils) Coggin Heeringa	21	22 9am-1pm Door Co Beekeepers Club Community Honey Harvest
Summer Wrap Up Hiking Day Anne Rockwell & Lizzie Rickwell	24	25	26 1:30pm Wandering Wednesday	27	28	29
	31	THE STORYTELLING CONTINUES! JOIN US FOR NEW TRAIL TALES EVERY MONTH STARTING IN SEPTEMBER.				



THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY CHALLENGE

Thanks to a generous matching gift from

Jim and Cathy Collins,

every dollar you give
will be doubled dollar-for-dollar up to

\$25,000

making your support go twice as far.

Together, we can empower the next 25 years of
discovery, curiosity, and community education.

**Your gift will directly support the programming and
opportunities that make Crossroads such a vibrant place.**

**Just last year, more than 11,000 people
took part in our educational programs!**

**Be part of the 25th Anniversary Challenge
and help shape the future of learning at Crossroads.**

**Crossroads
at Big Creek**
LEARNING CENTER NATURE PRESERVE
2041 Michigan Street
PO Box 608
Sturgeon Bay, WI 54235



**HAPPY
Anniversary
2001-2026**
Collins Learning Center
**Crossroads
at Big Creek**
LEARNING CENTER NATURE PRESERVE
Celebrating 25 Years of Learning!

Join us for this free event as we celebrate the
**25th Anniversary of
the Collins Learning Center!**

Explore a full lineup of hands-on activities
and outdoor adventures for all ages!

Featured Activities

- Hoverball Archery
- Guided Tours of the Heritage Garden and Heritage Village
- Bug Station – discover the tiny creatures that keep ecosystems thriving
- Sturgeon Bay School Student Art Show – creative works inspired by fish
- Electrofishing Demonstrations
- Feathered Friends (Birds & Habitat)
- Seeds & Native Plants

...and plenty more to discover!



**Event Kickoff: 9 AM
Meet at the Collins
Learning Center**

Crossroads staff will begin the celebration with exciting updates about the future of the Collins Learning Center and our growing campus. **Come explore, discover, and celebrate this special milestone with us!**

Community Partners



MARK YOUR CALENDARS
We hope you will join us!



Scan QR code or check our website for
additional activities more event details.

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