CROSSROADS
A NEWSLETTER FOR CROSSROADS AT BIG CREEK

Crossroads at Big Creek, Inc. - Scienti,ic, Historical En: ironmental Learning reser: e ol. 17, Issue 2 - Fall 2019

etting utdoors: Unstructured time at Crossroads

Fourth graders from Sunrise Elementary in Sturgeon Bay, along with their teacher, Bobby Deggendorf center , seine Big Creek for fish.

When science and math teacher Bobby Deggendorf and teaching associate Steve mentum first envisioned an after-school, outdoor immersion opportunity for their fourth-graders, an important part of their goal was to provide some unstructured play time.

"Our plan was to give kids some time when teachers and adults aren't the ones telling them what to do," Deggendorf explained. "And, we wanted to immerse them in their local ecosystem, not just seeing it on T, or reading about it. Crossroads at Big Creek offers the perfect place for this to happen."

etting in touch with nature at Crossroads.

Last spring, on Wednesday afternoons, the inaugural class of 20 to 30 Explorers walked from Sturgeon Bay's Sunrise Elementary School to Crossroads. After a quick snack, they'd participate in a loosely structured group activity, often taking advantage of seasonal events. "When the suckers were running in April, Deggendorf said, we plunged into the creek with seine nets to capture and observe them. One week we rescued tadpoles from a low-water swale. Another week we learned fire-building skills."

After the group activity, students were set loose to follow their fancy – join a pick-up game of Capture the Flag in the arboretum, build a fort in the woods, or simply explore. mentum was encouraged by the program's popularity. "It didn't take long for word to get out at school that this was tons of fun. The spots filled up almost immediately," he said.

Beyond fun, mentum admits to an ulterior motive. "Along with learning to be comfortable outdoors, we're teaching self-direction. We're allowing kids to socialize on their own terms and, in the process, they're learning more about themselves," he said. "Perhaps most significantly, by immersing kids in this beautiful place, we'd like to think we're inspiring the next generation of its caretakers."

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AT BIG CREEK inc.

Crossroads at Big Creek is a preserve that offers education, conducts research and provides outdoor experiences to inspire environmental stewardship in learners of all ages.

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Amazing things happen at Crossroads!

As I write this, fall is in the air and snow will soon be on the ground. This is without question one of my favorite times of year. I absolutely love the feeling that comes from a crisp, fall-morning hike with my dogs at Crossroads. But … I digress. First, I want to reflect on just a few of the amazing things that have happened at Crossroads in recent months.

In June, our 10th Annual Crossroads Trail Run drew more than 400 runners and walkers. The day was beautiful and I am thankful to all the wonderful volunteers, sponsors and participants who participated in the event that raised over $10,000! The proceeds support our Ski for Free program and help keep Crossroads' property in shape for all of our school groups, hikers and dog walkers like me!

Another successful event was the inaugural Honey Harvest held this past August. The event was organized by the Door County Beekeepers Club and it allowed learners of all ages to participate in activities like candlemaking and honey extraction from live hives. This was fascinating to see!

I am also thrilled to share the news that Crossroads received an Aerospace Outreach Award, accompanied by a $3,000 grant, at the Wisconsin Space Grant Consortium's annual conference. We received this award thanks to collaboration with the Door Peninsula Astronomical Society and the Door County Library System. This grant was used to expand space education to schools and youth and adult groups.

Of course, there is so much more that happened at Crossroads this summer and early fall – everything from naturalist programs for families to Heritage Garden harvests to archeological digs. It's my hope that you had a chance to take part in it. To find out about upcoming opportunities, check out our website, www.crossroadsatbigcreek.com, or like our Facebook page.

At Crossroads, we remain steadfast in our commitment to being a resource for the entire community. As our new membership brochure states, "Crossroads is open every day – at no charge – for all to enjoy." We will be working hard in the coming months to broaden Crossroads' base of support so we can continue to fulfill our mission and strive to serve the community in new ways.

Thank you for being a part of Crossroads at Big Creek!

Sincerely,
Matt Luders
Board of Directors president and dog walker

Crossroads welcomes area groups and individuals on a daily basis.

April - September
BY THE NUMBERS

School group participants: **1,451**
Youth group participants (non-school): **307**
Adult educational event participants: **1,630**
Other adult group event participants: **709**
Special event participants: **573**
Walkers, hikers, bikers, canoeists & kayakers: **countless!**

2019 Spring Summer in review

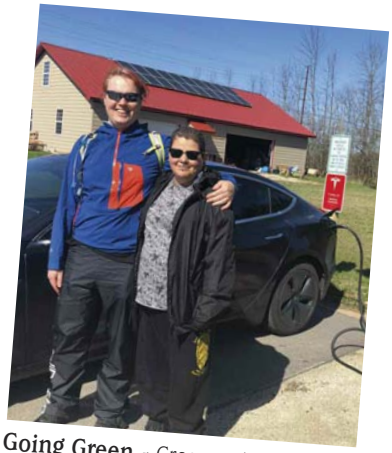
rail Run 2019 - 400 runners and walkers took to the trails for Crossroads' 10th annual Trail Run. The run raises $10,000 to support Crossroads' mission and programs.

Family gardening - Participants in the family gardening class held at Crossroads check the progress of their seedlings.

Water,est - Crossroads' educational theme for 2019 was the Great Lakes. Many events were planned in collaboration with Celebrate Water Door County. First and second graders from Sawyer Elementary School in Sturgeon Bay examine a variety of fish caught at The Cove Preserve – rainbow trout, baby northern pike, suckers and more. Warden Chris of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources assists.

Honey har: est - Door County Beekeepers Community Honey Harvest was abuzz with activity. Two apiarists demonstrate honey extraction from the demonstration flow hive at Crossroads.

Heritage Garden - Summer Educator Joan Wilkie, second from right, gives a tour of Crossroads' Heritage Garden as part of the summer educational offerings.



Going Green - Crossroads' electric car charging stations are free, open to the public and in high demand. Jarred Howard, left, and Luna Benevides, of Madison, Wisconsin, stop to refuel on their way north.

Research - UW-Oshkosh research intern, Morgan Swenson, tests water samples at Crossroads' lab. Crossroads partners with the UW-Oshkosh Environmental Research and Innovation Center and numerous public health agencies.

Kids and archaeology - Over the course of a number of weeks, middle school students from Sevastopol, Southern Door, T.J. Walker and St. John Bosco, participated in an archaeological dig at The Cove Preserve, led by Midwest Archeological Consultants.

Thank you, Rich

Rich Propsom retired from his position as Crossroads' Land and Facility Manager in 2019. He is pictured in front of one of the swales he designed.

Four years ago, when Rich Propsom interviewed for the position of Land and Facilities Manager at Crossroads, he told our committee that he "saw himself as being more than a custodian." We had no idea how much MORE would turn out to be.

Propsom developed the concept for and designed our environmentally friendly parking lot. He created the beautiful rock gardens and planted the native wildflowers around the learning center. He renovated the restrooms. He built furniture for the lower level learning space and created our electric kiosk. He planned and oversaw the installation of the dock and kayak landing at The Cove Preserve. And, he upgraded our trail system and opened up acres and acres of the preserves that were overgrown with buckthorn, honeysuckle and other invasive species.

And, oh yes … he fixed equipment and mowed and plowed and groomed and maintained the buildings.

Crossroads' swale system

Perhaps Propsom's most impressive accomplishment, though, was the creation of Crossroads' swale system. The swales that buffer the Collins Learning Center are a series of deep soil depressions connected by ditches. They were designed to restore the historic drainage pattern of surface water in the Big Creek Preserve while enhancing wildlife habitat by creating a number of longer-lasting ponds.

This year was supposed to be the "dry run" for our new swale system. Summer and fall 2019 turned out to be anything but dry. We are thrilled to report that even during repeated extreme rain events, the swale system exceeded expectations. The swales carried water away from the parking lot and buildings and filtered and cleaned it before it entered Big Creek. In addition, they provided prime habitat for frogs, toads and birds.

Propsom retired in the spring of 2019. We are grateful for his many contributions to Crossroads at Big Creek.

Photo by Jeff Schmid

A portion of Crossroads' new swale system is visible to the left of the Collins Learning Center. The system mimics Big Creek's natural hydrology and provides wetland habitat.

Improvements planned for popular Cove Preserve

The Cove Preserve, where Big Creek spills into Sturgeon Bay, is a 9-acre shoreland jewel. The property, slated for homesites, was purchased by Crossroads in 2016. Designated a state-registered archaeological site, it was a seasonal settlement for generations of Native Americans. It now welcomes hundreds of school children for educational programs each year. It also provides habitat for spawning fish and attracts a variety of waterfowl. For thousands of years, it's been a busy place!

In 2018, it got even busier. With help from Leadership Door County, Crossroads installed a observation platform and floating kayak and canoe launch at the site.

The popularity of the preserve, which is open to the public at no charge, has necessitated a safe, well-designed parking area and appropriate signage. Crossroads has created a plan that will accomplish these objectives without negatively impacting the environment or the aesthetics of the area. The plan includes a pull-through driveway for school buses. It routes traffic away from the archaeological site and it protects fish habitat by inhibiting silt erosion into the bay. It also includes a pull-up area near the launch for unloading boats.

Photo by Dennis Connolly

A kayaker paddles from The Cove Preserve launch to nearby Sturgeon Bay.

Total project costs for improvements to The Cove are expected to be $65,000. For additional information or to make a contribution, contact Crossroads Assistant Director Laurel Hauser at laurel@crossroadsatbigcreek.org or call 920-746-5895.

Emily Rux: Archaeologist-in-residence

One of Crossroads' 2019 strategic goals is to provide a home base for "research-in-residence" programs. Toward this goal, we are pleased to welcome Emily Rux as an archaeologist-in-residence. Rux is an archaeological technician and works with Midwest Archaeology Consultants. She will be cleaning, evaluating and cataloguing artifacts that area middle school students have helped discover at The Cove and Ida Bay preserves over the past six years. The sites have yielded evidence of flint-knapping (stone tool making), partial and intact projectile points and prehistoric ceramic fragments indicative of the Middle and Late Woodland eras, approximately 1,500 to 2,000 years ago.

Archaeological technician Emily Rux is an archaeologist-in-residence at Crossroads at Big Creek.

Crossroads' archeologist-in-residence program is funded in part by the Raibrook Foundation and a grant from the Wisconsin Humanities Council, with funds from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Welcome, Laurel Hauser and Nick Lutzke

Laurel Hauser was hired in April of 2019 as the Assistant Director at Crossroads. She worked for many years as the Director of Charitable Giving for the Door County Land Trust and as editor of the Washington Island Observer.

Laurel Hauser, Assistant Director

The opportunity that excites her most at Crossroads? "I'd like to expand Crossroads' base of support to fuel growth. Crossroads is an incredible asset to the Door County community. I'll be working to make sure the community is involved in envisioning and creating Crossroads' future."

Laurel and her husband, John, live in Sturgeon Bay.

Nick Lutzke joined the Crossroads staff in April of 2019 as the Land and Facilities Manager after years in the private sector in manufacturing management. He is an ardent outdoor enthusiast. "I've spent most of my life outdoors – hiking, camping, studying and just enjoying nature. I'm happiest when I'm outside."

Nick Lutzke, Land and Facilities Manager

The opportunity that excites him most at Crossroads? "Taking care of the land. Making sure Mother Nature gets the foothold she needs to make this ecosystem thrive."

Nick lives with his wife, Krista, and son, Owen, in Sturgeon Bay.

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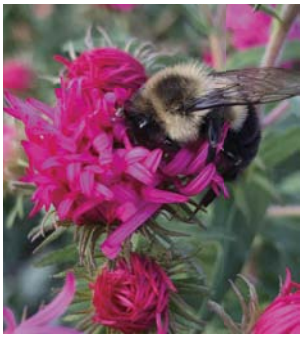
Photo by Nick Lutzke

A boy and his dog and an early morning sunrise at Crossroads.

Announcing Crossroads' 2020 Educational Theme: Habitats



Within the Crossroads preserve we find a number of forests, several wetlands, a creek, a shoreline, an upland meadow and prairie plantings—all important habitats, and some of special value as stopover habitats for migrating birds and butterflies and for spawning fish.

Our educational outreach for 2020 will revolve around the topic of habitats – how to assess them, how to care for them, how to restore them.

Investigate – We plan to review research pertaining to habitats (including the history of human habitation) and also to learn how other environmental centers are dealing with habitat issues.

Inventory – We intend to inventory the plants and animals of Crossroads and to evaluate which plants are of value and which should be removed and replaced.

Improve – We are in the process of developing land management and invasive species mitigation plans with the goal of making our habitats more productive.

Interpret – We will offer a variety of educational programs (many experience-based) on habitats for learners of all ages.

Invite – We will invite the community to explore our preserves by creating Habitat Loops – designated trails featuring different habitats. We will be creating and distributing an interpretive trail guide to encourage our visitors to learn about these special ecosystems.

Ski season is upon us: Calling volunteers!

Calling volunteers who enjoy being outdoors, fitting skiers with free-to-use equipment, and getting a thrill out of the happiness skiers exude upon returning from their first cross-country ski at Crossroads! So you've never done anything like this before? Friends of Crossroads will provide quick training, and you will always have a partner. Time commitment is what you want it to be. If this sounds like you, please call Gretchen at 920-493-0090 to volunteer.