

Partnerships Enhance Rural Learning Opportunities

Last year, students from North Crawford Elementary School visited Second Nature at Reads Creek nursery in Readstown, Wisconsin for a field trip to learn about eagles, frogs, colors and flowers. They listened to a story, used their bodies to measure the width of an eagle nest, examined tadpoles, and splashed in the creek after a picnic on the beach. Following the excitement of the field trip, nursery owners Dave and Jen Tubbin thought it would be great to take this outdoor experience to the next level. Their goal was to create a set of educational backpacks that families could check out when they came to the nursery. The backpacks would be filled with activities and supplies for the family-centered outdoor activities. When North Crawford's elementary principal, Amanda Killeen, heard about this, she reached out to ask if the school could help in some way.



Killeen successfully applied for a grant under the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act Stronger Connections Grant Program. This program aims to support community partnerships that promote place-based education and provide opportunities for exploring mental health needs through outdoor learning activities. North Crawford was chosen as a recipient of this competitive grant. As part of their community partnership objective, Killeen was delighted to collaborate with the Nature Rangers program at Second Nature at Reads Creek.

The collaboration involved funding of \$1,800 to provide supply kits for students participating in the school's out-of-school time programs. These kits will enhance students' experiences in nature at Second Nature and be available for use with the whole community. The funds will be



used to purchase necessary supplies, facilitating the program's expansion to benefit the broader community. This expansion will foster stronger collaboration among the school, families, homeschool students, and the nursery.

In addition, Second Nature's event coordinator, Karen Solverson, reached out to UWL's Community Engagement Coordinator, Lisa Klein, who was able to match the project with Associate Professor, Dr. Heidi Masters. Dr. Masters will be working with her science methods pre-service education students and Second Nature at Reads Creek in the fall of 2023 to develop activities and a list of necessary supplies to further develop the Nature Rangers program at the nursery. The grant funds will be used to purchase supplies to continue the development of the Nature Rangers educational programming. The educational backpacks, which will be the focus project for UWL

students, are slated to be ready for nursery visitors next spring.



Second Nature at Reads Creek Nursery, S7301 Hwy 14, Readstown, WI (608) 629-5975



Klein said, "UW-La Crosse takes great pride in partnering with agencies to meet community needs while helping students gain practical experience. Community engagement - whether it's through internship, volunteerism or classroom partnerships - builds a sense of belonging for students and helps them explore the area beyond the boundaries of a classroom."



The partnership between Second Nature at Reads Creek, North Crawford Elementary School, and UWL's Education Studies Department is just one example of how members of the community can come together to provide local students and families with meaningful outdoor experiences. It's a win-win opportunity for everyone.



Second Nature is quickly becoming known as a family business that creates engaging outdoor experiences for visitors. Past programming includes crowd favorite educational events such as the Gem & Fossil Event, where families learn about the Driftless through an adventurous hike and hands-on educational rock-hounding activities. The recent Birds of Prey “Meet and Greet”



event brought families together to interact and raise funds to care for the rescued birds of River Valley Raptors. Second Nature at Reads Creek also collaborated with the Driftless Humane Society for a Dog Days of Summer Event. This program focused on teaching families how to create interactive outdoor spaces for pets, while providing fun activities and photo-ops to support the Driftless Humane Society.

“Our team is made of teachers, artists, and passionate hobbyists who work hard to put together these

opportunities for families,” the Tubbins explained. “This side of the business is very much a non-profit labor of love. We are so appreciative of donations, partnerships, and people who support the educational programming we are working hard to provide.” Families or groups who wish to contribute to educational programming efforts are encouraged to reach out. Second Nature at Reads Creek truly is a destination nursery, solidly rooted in community.



The nursery’s upcoming activities and events can be found at:
www.SecondNatureAtReadsCreek.com.

Article and images by Karen Solverson