



Reminders...

...Summer registrations will be in cubbies March 17th and 18th. Please fill them out and return them as soon as possible.
...Parent-Teacher Conferences will be April 2nd and 3rd. Please check the hallway for the sign-up sheets.
...Mark your calendars for the Family Picnic on May 16.

**Nature Explore™ Family Club
2008 Calendar**

(all events 10:30AM-Noon)
April 12...Holmes Lake Park
May 10...Arbor Day Farm
Picnic following

Bookshelf

- Not A Box and Not A Stick* by Antoinette Portis
- The Caterpillar and the Polliwog* by Jack Kent
- LOOK! LOOK! LOOK!* by Tana Hoban
- Look! Look! Look!* by Nancy Elizabeth Wallace
- Me on a Map* by Joan Sweeney
- Changes, Changes* by Pat Hutchins
- Sometimes I Dance Mountains* by Byrd Baylor
- I Love Our Earth* by Bill Martin Jr. and Michael Sampson
- My World* by Lois Ehlert
- The Way to Start a Day* by Byrd Baylor
- It Looks Like Spilled Milk* by Charlees G. Shaw
- Little Cloud* by Eric Carle
- Little Smudge* by Lionel Le Neouanic

Family vacation is a natural experience

By Tami Britton, Teacher

It may still be cold outside, but at our house we are already dreaming about our family summer vacation. Only a few years ago, I considered the best kind of family vacation to be Disney World (they say it's the greatest place on earth, right?) Well, we've done Disney twice—with cousins, aunt and uncle, and grandparents—and I do not regret it. But I'm not sure the "magical kingdom" qualifies as number one on my list of favorite memories. We do have lingering memories of standing in miserably hot lines that were usually close to an hour long—for rides that lasted less than five minutes. This was with my nephews and our own daughters—ages 2,3,5 and 6—as they cried, "Do we have to stand in line again?" And I kept reassuring them that it would be worth it; I was determined it would be worth it at the price we had paid to get in. At the end of the day we had four exhausted children (some were screaming) and six possibly more frazzled adults.

Over the past few years, because of my work at Dimensions, I decided it might be nice to try an outdoor vacation. After asking our extended family if we could give it a try, we planned our first big family vacation in the world of nature. Much to our surprise, it ended up being better than any previous vacation. We weren't worried about pushing the kids along: one reason was that most of the fun was free, and second the kids were so contented, we surely didn't want to mess up a good thing.

No lines, no crowds, and no vendors seducing my children to buy their sugary treats. At the end

of the day, although we were ready for a good night's rest, we were all refreshed and in great moods. The kids were reminiscing about the fun filled day in the river, on the bikes, and up the trails. And they were excitedly planning to fish and swim the next day.

Over the past few years, we've continued to take our vacations in natural settings. Once we visited the Gulf Coast where my girls enjoyed designing gowns of seaweed. Last summer on the alpine lakes near Lake Tahoe, they constructed houses out of rocks, branches, and hollowed out trees. Then they built miniature cities in the sand, using what they collected on the shore: shells, rocks,

driftwood, flowers, and grass. They pretended they were lost in the wilderness and used a variety of things they picked up to survive the elements. Our children have

never been happier. It is an inexpensive way to vacation, but the memories are priceless.

If you have already discovered the benefits of a vacation up in the mountains or

down at the beach, you know what I mean. If you haven't, give it a try. I venture to say it's a vacation you'll not soon forget, and something you'll want to do again. For us, it is not Disney World anymore, but the world of nature that is truly the greatest place on earth.



Enjoying the world of nature near Lake Tahoe!

Update to "The toys are taking over" article

By Michelle Zimmer, Programs Director

In my last article, I talked about why it is important that favorite toys stay at home. I shared the scenario about my son wanting to bring the ball to school and how as a parent you can just say, "Sorry, that's the school's rule." This helps eliminate (hopefully) some of the arguing because it is matter of fact and not your rule.

Well, I had to take my own advice the other morning as my son Caden walked up to me as we were getting ready in the morning and said, "Mom, I really want to take this ball to school today". (And of course, he had some long explanation of why it was extremely important). I just

chuckled and told him that I had just written a story about him in the newsletter and it was about him wanting to bring a ball to school. (He got a great big smile on his face and then asked, "what's a newsletter and can I see it?" Well, I thought, this is my teachable moment, so I brought out the newsletter and read parts of that article to him (the part about him and the where it says it is the school's rule that he couldn't bring toys to school). After he looked to see if there were any pictures of him in the newsletter, he was on his way and didn't ask me again to bring that ball to school. Hopefully, you will have just as much luck with your "teachable moments."

Connecting children with nature is a growing movement today

By Brooke Levy, Parent; Extension Educator, University of Nebraska Extension; and, Nebraska Project Learning Tree and Project WET State Coordinator

Lincoln, NE has joined the growing national movement to connect children and families with nature.



Richard Louv

Recently, the Healthy Families Play Outside (HFPO) network invited Richard Louv, author of *Last Child in the Woods*, *Saving Our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder* to address the human connection to nature in a lecture presented at the Lied Center for Performing Arts.

Louv discussed the critical need for today's children and families to experience unstructured time in nature (i.e. digging in the soil, building tree-houses, exploring a prairie, catching frogs, tromping around in a wetland, turning over rocks to find insects and worms, etc.). Louv says that, "if children do not attach to the land, they will not reap the psychological and



Randolph Elementary School After-school nature club – Dimensions' alums Noah (L) and Tristan (R).

spiritual benefits they glean from nature, nor will they feel a long-term commitment to the environment, to the place."

Many of our children today face the challenge of being over-scheduled with activities such as sports, music and dance. In the past, children spent much of their free time playing outside. The majority of today's children spend that same time watching television or playing video games. As a parent and professional environmental educator, I have to ask myself, "How will these cultural changes affect the future of our children and society?"

For current research and information on the national movement to reconnect children with nature, please visit the Children and Nature Network website at www.cnaturenet.org.



Healthy Families Play Outside partners are working together to help people of all ages foster a life-long relationship with nature. Partners include University of Nebraska Extension, Nebraska Statewide Arboretum, Lower Platte South NRD, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Lincoln Children's Zoo, Pioneers Park Nature Center, The Groundwater Foundation and Nature Explore: Dimensions Educational Research Foundation and Arbor Day Foundation. This partnership grew out of a professional reading group in May of 2006. Since then, the partners have engaged in several exciting projects. Our most current projects include after-school nature clubs at seven Lincoln

Public Schools, five family nature nights at Lincoln Public Schools, Dimensions Family Nature Explore Club, and the Lincoln Safari.

For more information about Healthy Families Play Outside, please visit our website: healthyfamiliesplayoutside.org



The Lincoln Safari is an exciting adventure being lead by the Lincoln Children's Zoo in partnership with HFPO. The goal of the Safari is to engage children and their families in nature by following clues throughout Lincoln to 35 different natural sites. Each site is identified by a post with a rubbing plate.

When a family team registers for this fun year-long program, they receive a treasure map and guidebook. The guidebook contains clues to each site and a place for your children to complete their rubbing. Ideas for how to discover nature with your children is included in the guidebook. Already more than 2500 Lincoln families are participating.

For more information or to register, visit your local public library or sign up on line at: lincolnsafari.org or signup at any Nature Explore Family Club event . You can also contact Chris Kiewra: chrisk@dimensionsfoundation.org

The national movement to



Brooke Levy, sons Noah and Sam, on Safari

engage children in nature play has not only had an impact on my professional work, but also as a parent. Like all parents, I want what is best for my children. I don't want to be responsible for over-scheduled, stressed out children who don't have the time and energy to discover the wonders of nature. I want to provide opportunities for my children to help them develop into well-balanced adults who have a



Noah recording one of his rubbings.

positive relationship with nature and a strong sense of place. My husband, Mark Humpert and I have made a family commitment to make nature play and exploration a priority—above having a clean house! We intentionally chose Dimensions Early Education programs for our children (Noah, now in Kindergarten and Sam, currently in

the toddler program) because nature exploration is imbedded in the curriculum. As parents, we can only do our best.

Nature play does not need to be difficult. It can be as simple as exploring the flowers and insects in your backyard or going for a neighborhood nature walk. Let your children lead you in discovering the wonders of nature. You might be surprised by what you find—you certainly will have fun.

Newsletter photos by Tami Britton and Brooke Levy

Nature Explore® Classrooms are part of a national initiative involving the partnership of Dimensions and the Arbor Day Foundation.

Newsletters and Program information can be found on-line ...
www.dimensionsfoundation.org or www.firstplymouth.org