

With nature center, Scout projects yield beautiful reward

By SUE BUCK
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Some people see nature only from an outdoor perspective. PTA volunteer Diane Kuuttila knows it is an outdoor classroom.

Kuuttila, a mother of four children who lives near the Alameda Early Childhood Center in Farmington, is dedicated to the nature center which is a five-acre parcel of school property directly behind the school building.

A branch of the Rouge is being preserved through the nature center.

Several years ago Kuuttila and Amy Cleary, another mother whose children attended Alameda, took a special interest in enhancing the site two years ago. Cleary's children went on to Beechview.

Kuuttila is known as the naturecenter director. Her knowledge is coupled with sensory experiences.

"Every time I go down there I see something, a heron or a snapping turtle," Kuuttila said. She has a degree in natural resources from Michigan State

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Diane Kuuttila
—Alameda PTA volunteer

University and is a master gardener. Because she needs to do volunteer work to keep up her certification as a master gardener, the nature center provides an ideal setting.

Before devoting her full time to her family, Kuuttila tested water and soil in a laboratory for the Environmental Protection Agency. She hopes to eventually secure employment as a landscape gardener.

Married to Eric, their children are Nick, 11, Kari, 10, Wesley, 7, and Robbie, 4.

Kuuttila has assisted and directed five Eagle Scout projects at the nature center including most recently that of Robbie Ghosh of Farmington Hills. He built and secured a sepal style bench in an area along the path for observing the surrounding nature. He placed 10 sitting loops and secured them in a cir-



STAFF PHOTO BY SHARON LAMOTZ

Strolling through nature: Diane Kuuttila with Nick, 11; Robbie, 4; Wesley, 7, enjoy a walk through the nature center behind Alameda Early Childhood Center.

cle discussion area adding wood chipping on a long path and discussion area.

"He is an extremely good listener and does what you tell him to do," Kuuttila said. "He did a lot of physical labor. Our community would be a lot better if we had more Boy Scouts and Eagle Scouts."

The impact of the Eagle Scout projects is most demonstrated when both the before and after is seen, she said.

One Eagle Scout built a bridge and a PTA group had stairs built, she said.

Kuuttila wrote and was awarded a \$1,000 Michigan NEST

grant two years ago. She developed a school habitat of wildflowers indigenous to the area. "These are plants native to our area," Kuuttila said.

Alameda Principal Helene Blackman mentioned the attraction of a butterfly garden and the bridge which is dubbed, "Crawdad Crossing."

Students also have learned about endangered plant species, like lady slippers, Blackman said.

Storybook land is a section of the nature center where school children sit on tree stumps or logs while their teacher reads to them.

Eagle ambition: They take pride in serving

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Robbie Ghosh and Ricky Paul Singh both of Farmington Hills, recently earned the rank of Eagle Scout.

They were honored at an Eagle Scout Court of Honor held at Kenbrook Elementary School and by Farmington Hills Mayor Nancy Bates at a Farmington Hills city council meeting. They achieved the highest honor in Boy Scouting by earning a certain number of badges, holding a position of responsibility in their troop and completing a community service project, among other requirements.

Ghosh's project involved renovation of the nature center at Alameda Early Childhood Center in Farmington. His goal was to build and then secure a sepal-style bench in an area along the path for observing the surrounding nature, then create a circle discussion area with 10 sitting "loops."

Ghosh organized and led Boy Scout Troop 263 and 12 parent volunteers over two Saturdays through each phase of the project which was completed Sept. 16, 2000. There were about 167 hours spent in organization.

Singh's project centered around renovations at the Sikh Temple in Novi. It included planning, arranging volunteers and funds, purchase of building material and serving in a leadership role in the project management.

The project included repairing and painting walls, doors and ceiling, installing ceiling tiles, repairing electrical fixtures and exit signs and final cleanup. He arranged 23 volunteers to help him with the project on three weekends in a combined effort that took about 160 hours.

Both Scouts are graduates of Detroit Country Day in Beverly Hills and both received scholarships to the Honors School of Business at Indiana University.

Priya Ghosh, Robbie's father, said the two boys are friends



Honored: Eagle Scouts (from left) Robbie Ghosh, Ricky Paul Singh.

who grew up together. "They went to school together at Detroit Country Day and now will go to the same college together," he said.

Ghosh participated in varsity football for six years at Detroit Country Day and was part of the 1999 state championship football team. He earned the coach's award and an all-area honorable

mention in the fall of 2000. He was a member of the junior varsity ski team for four years.

At Detroit Country Day, Singh played on the football, hockey and varsity wrestling teams. He was captain of the snowboarding team. He took a leadership role in arranging a one-month trip to Europe for six Detroit Country Day students.



In the park: A butterfly box with wild flowers surrounding.

Lawn from page A1

sod. But Cohen's decision hasn't been in a vacuum.

One of the new inhabitants amongst her blades of grass is the dreaded dandelion, which has irked some neighbors.

"I'm really sorry if you're not happy with what my lawn looks like," Cohen said of her response to a particular neighbor.

He asked that she keep her dandelions in check when they go to seed, so they don't spread into his lawn. He also offered to give her the phone number of his lawn care service.

Dandelion greens are a food source among many cultures. But Cohen said she won't be munching on her greens because of fertilizer run-off from neighboring lawns.

She said she realizes she's fighting an uphill battle.

"Why do we have to think a green lawn is beautiful? What's wrong with clover?"

West Bloomfield Township recently passed an ordinance restricting fertilizer use, in response to growing algae problems in the township's 26 lakes.

The ordinance shortens the fertilizing season, prohibits fertilizer applications during rain showers and cuts the use of phosphorus-based fertilizers. Violations are treated as civil infractions, carrying \$100 fines.

Hills Naturalist Joe Derek, whose lawn has been chemical free since 1986, said fertilizers, when they run off into waterways, can cause fish to die.

"Especially with days like today when it's so hot, you have all these chemicals going in the water — you're going to get fish kills," Derek said.



STAFF PHOTO BY SHARON LAMOTZ

Her view: Sherri Cohen checks out landscaping.

The Friends of the Rouge, a volunteer group dedicated toward raising awareness about watersheds and organizing clean-ups of the river, have discussed creating 10-15 foot buffer zones for rivers and ponds.

This means people who own property on them would not be able to mow within 10-15 feet of the water.

"That strip of vegetation would act as a filter," he said.

But drafting an ordinance is one thing — getting people to follow it is something completely different.

"It's logical that we start to control some over-fertilized areas," said Councilwoman Vicki Barnett. "I know it will be very

difficult to enforce." Norene Yuskowatz, president of the Hills Council of Homeowners Association, said people need to be educated about fertilizers but that an ordinance wasn't necessarily the answer.

"Being that I live on a retention pond, I don't put a lot of fertilizer down," Yuskowatz said. Her landscaping company recommended she put down five to seven applications, but she said she does three instead.

"I don't think people need as much fertilizer as what they put down."

But, "Farmington Hills" doesn't need to keep making ordinances to limit people's freedoms."

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