The Chrysalis

Oak Tree Award Recipient Honored

Each year, the St. Joseph County Parks Foundation presents the Oak Tree Award to individuals or organizations of vision who support and improve the St. Joseph County Parks. At the annual summer meeting, the Foundation recognized Dr. Elmer R. Graber as the recipient of this year’s Oak Tree Award.

Dr. Elmer R. Graber

In June of 2020, St. Joseph County Parks was contacted by the Community Foundation of St. Joseph County, about a donor interested in the possibility of making an annual gift to the St. Joseph County Parks. The potential donor was concerned about the lack of knowledge kids have about our natural world and the lack of time they spend outdoors.

A proposal was put together by park staff that showcased the interpretive and leisure opportunities offered at the parks and the types of programmatic opportunities the parks would be able to provide with the aid of additional funds.

In 2022, St. Joseph County Parks received its first annual contribution from the Dr. Elmer R. Graber Youth Fund for Exploring Nature. Because of these funds, over 1,000 youth and families were able to learn about pond life, nocturnal animals, the night sky, water quality management, turtle rehabilitation, the St. Joseph River, and how the fur trade helped to settle South Bend. Some had the opportunity to canoe or kayak for the first time and others learned how to use a map to navigate through a park, play a round of disc golf and more.

This generous annual contribution to the County Parks has enriched the lives of so many youth! Being outdoors enhances learning, encourages creativity, supports a broad range of learning styles, and improves physical and emotional health. Dr. Graber’s generosity to the County Parks through the Dr. Elmer R. Graber Youth Fund for Exploring Nature makes it possible for the St. Joseph County Parks to offer these benefits to the youth of our community now and for years to come!

Annual Summer Meeting

There was a nice turn out for the annual summer meeting in July. If you were unable to attend, highlights included honoring Dr. Elmer R. Graber as the 2023 Oak Tree Award recipient and a program by Nicole Harmon, Wildlife Center Director for Humane Indiana Wildlife, on the rescue, rehabilitation and release of ND17. ND17 is the eaglet that fell from the eagle’s nest at ND LEEF at St. Patrick’s County Park in July 2022.

A shortage in park staff spurred the change in meeting format as park staff assists immensely in the planning and organizing of this event. Since the meeting format was well received, it will be repeated again next summer with a different speaker. We hope you will join us!
Welcome members!

Thank you to recent new and renewed members:

(March through September)
Philip Armstrong & Flo Wright
Erin & George Bonin / The Deahl Family
The Duff-Batteast Family
Chris & Patty Fowler / Bruce Grafford
Doug & Janice Irvine
TJ & Julia Kanczuzewski
Lyrin Kanczuzewski / Elizabeth Raven
Susan Rece / Maureen Smith
Ellyn Stecker & Peter Smith
Seth Szlapi / Kerry Temple
Benjamin Tovar / Joan Tweedell
Barbara Wind / John & Carrie Yarger

Stay informed on upcoming programs
If you would like to stay up-to-date on the latest program offerings at the St. Joseph County Parks call (574) 654-3155 and ask to be placed on the St. Joseph County Parks monthly e-newsletter email list!

Update: County Parks Master Plan
Work continues on the 5-Year Master Plan. The goal of the plan is to provide recommendations to guide the future growth and development of St. Joseph County Parks as well as provide a comprehensive look at how the Parks Department can continue to improve and meet the needs of residents of all ages and abilities. To learn more about the Master Plan go to sjcparkplan.com

Tail Waggin’ Hayride
Join us at Bendix Woods County Park on November 5 from 2:00-4:00pm for the last hayride of the season!

Bring your dog for a tractor-drawn hayride through the crisp autumn air. Afterwards, warm up by the campfire with free hot cocoa and s’mores. Fee for this program is $5/person and a pet-related donation. Local animal rescue Pets Connect! will benefit from the donations. Dogs must be on a 6-foot leash.

Raising Funds
Interactive Pond Exhibit - Update
Fundraising efforts continue for the interactive pond exhibit at Bendix Woods County Park. As you may remember, the 2022 joint End-of-Year Fundraising Campaign with the Friends of Bendix Woods and Spicer Lake, focused its efforts on raising funds for this exhibit. Efforts are moving along as we now have raised over $41,000 towards our $100,000 goal. The 2023 End-of-Year Fundraising Campaign will once again be directed towards this interactive, hands-on exhibit. If you would like to be a part of the fundraising efforts for this project, please start planning now. Your donation will help make this exhibit happen!

Thank you to everyone who has previously donated!

Park Tours
Board Members Learn about the Parks
This summer, board members had the opportunity to learn more about Bendix Woods County Park and Spicer Lake Nature Preserve via tours led by St. Joseph County Parks Director Steve Slauson and Deputy Director Leslie Witkowski. At Bendix Woods County Park, board members toured the Nature Center and the Sugar House and learned about the history of the park. At Spicer Lake Nature Preserve, the group enjoyed a hike to Spicer Lake and learned how the lake was formed by glaciers. It was a beautiful day and the information shared allowed board members the opportunity to become more familiar with the parks and how they serve our community.

Enjoy the Parks
Fall Hayrides are Here!
Enjoy the beauty of fall at Bendix Woods County Park on a tractor drawn hayride! Start a yearly tradition with your friends, family, business or organization by booking a private 2-hour hayride with a campfire. This private hayride gives your group the chance to relax, bond, create memories and enjoy the fall season! Visit sjcparks.org for more information on how to book your private hayride.

Public Hayrides: October 8
Departure times: 1:30pm, 2pm, and 2:30pm
Bendix Woods County Park: Playground
Fee: $3/person
No registration required.

Cupcakes & Hayrides: October 18
6-8pm
Bendix Woods County Park: Van Paris Shelter
Fee: $5/person
Registration required. Call (574) 654-3155

To renew your membership, or for park program info: sjcparks.org

Find us: facebook.com/sjcparks @sjcoparks