



Do Project on Famous Missourians

Fourth-graders at St. Gertrude School are currently studying famous Missourians. Students did a written report on a person and then made a likeness of him or her for social studies. From left are Clayton Walde, Ellie Unerstall, Amanda Hellmann and Cole Glastetter.

Missourian Photo.

Nature Explore Classroom

•Continued From 1B

enriching," she said. "You can put an old log down or designate a space where they can dig, things like that."

Look around your backyard or make a trip to the park to find natural "toys" like pinecones, fallen leaves and fallen tree branches/sticks.

All of the materials used to build the Nature Explore Classroom were found on the SNR property, said Toth. The two large hollowed out tree trunks, for example, are the remains of an old sycamore tree that was discovered on the gravel bar down by the Meramec River.

Outdoor Play Strengthens Learning

When kids visit the Nature Explore Classroom, they will feel like they're just playing, but their brains and bodies will know otherwise. Inadvertently, they will be learning valuable lessons that will help them in the classroom and, down the road, in the workplace.

Picking up and moving the logs in the build-it room helps develop their big muscles. Digging around in the sandboxes will teach them rules about weight and volume.

"Research is beginning to show how important it is to have these experiences, this frequent, unstructured play outdoors," said Toth. "There's growing evidence that too much structured play is not always so enriching."

Studies by the Dimensions Educational Research Foundation, which collaborated with the Arbor Day Foundation to establish the Nature Explore Classroom at SNR, of how children ages 2 to 8 develop visual-spatial skills have found children are being left behind.

"Many young girls are not getting the visual-spatial experiences they will need to help them be successful in later math and science learning," the Dimensions Web site (www.dimensions-foundation.org) notes.

"Children with verbal language delays and other special needs often learn best through visual-spatial activities and struggle if this type of learning is limited in their home or school settings.

"For many children, especially those from homes where parents do not read or write well, visual-spatial activities can be the link children need to help them learn speaking, reading and writing skills. Without visual-spatial activities, children often struggle to develop literacy skills."



Brothers Jake, left, and Nick Powers, Wildwood, were all smiles as they climbed and crawled their way around the Nature Explore Classroom at Shaw Nature Reserve in Gray Summit. The facility officially opens next Saturday, March 29.

The benefit of developing these visual-spatial skills is a child/adult who pays more attention to the world around them, Dimensions notes.

"They notice and appreciate the details of life: the architecture of buildings... the kinds of trees in their neighborhoods.

"Visual-spatial skills give people the ability to negotiate well in space: to follow maps, move easily along a forest trail, or maneuver a car into a tight parking space."

People with highly developed visual-spatial skills go on to work in fields such as mathematics, architecture, engineering, geology, sculpture, computer science and aviation, among other things.

Outdoors Safer Than We Think

As a mother, Toth understands the fears today's parents have about turning their kids loose outside, especially with the possibility of having them kidnapped or molested. But the reality, she said, is that the prevalence of these crimes has actually been going down over the last several decades.

Of course, that doesn't make the fear of it happening to your child any less real, she knows, but keeping kids inside and only letting them out for soccer practice

is now known to be harming them in other ways.

"If we don't let kids take risks when they're young, when they're older, they won't have the problem-solving skills they need for when Mom and Dad aren't around," said Toth.

"Parents want to protect their children, but we may have gone too far," she commented.

That is what makes a space like the Nature Explore Classroom so valuable, said Toth. It's designed with education in mind and specifically for children to climb, run, jump and crawl on.

The tree trunks and logs have been secured in place so they won't roll or tip over unexpectedly. The walkway or path between the rooms is made of gravel with a layer of sand underneath.

Kid-friendly plantings will be added over time. Some will be edible, all will be "steppable," since children ages 2 to 10 are the target users of the space.

"Splinters may be a problem," said Toth, smiling, "but we can't do anything about that."

The Nature Explore Classroom is included with admission to Shaw Nature Reserve. Admission is \$3 per person or free to SNR and Missouri Botanical Garden members. An annual family membership to SNR is \$30.

'High School Musical' Coming to Munny Stage

Disney's "High School Musical" will debut on the Munny Stage June 23-July 2.

Season tickets for The Munny's seven-show season begin at just \$49 and will be available beginning March 29. Single tickets will go on sale May 31.

"High School Musical" spotlights Gabriella, a "brainiac," and Troy, a "jock." Their lives — and their school — are turned upside-down when they both audition for the high school musical.

Eye-popping dance numbers, catchy tunes, cool costumes and a message to follow your dreams are at the heart of this musical for young people.

Approximately 100 million viewers in 100 countries have seen the movie, and the soundtrack topped the pop music charts as the best-selling album of 2006.

Subscriber dates for Disney's "High School Musical" are June 23-29. Three additional shows will be performed June 30 and July 1 and 2.

Exceptional seats for individual tickets and groups will be available for

the final three performances. Group rates begin at just 20 people. To purchase group tickets, call 314-361-1900, extension 308.

The other six shows of The Munny's season are Mel Brooks' "The Producers" (June 16-22), "My Fair Lady" (July 7-13), "90 Years of Munny Magic" (July 14-20), "Miss Saigon" (July 21-27), Gershwin's "My One and Only" (July 28-Aug. 3), and "Fiddler on the Roof" (Aug. 4-10).

For more information, visit www.munny.org or call 314-361-1900.



Leap Day Babies Given Special T's

Three babies born at St. John's Mercy Hospital, Washington, on Friday, Feb. 29, Leap Day, were given special Leap Day T-shirts. Front row, from left, are Aaliyah Bates, Maegan Bates holding Rihanna Bates, Ashley Fritz holding Alessia Michiosy and Angelia Diestelkamp holding Landen Diestelkamp. Back row, from left, are Kelly Linders, RN, BSN, manager of labor and delivery, Junior Michiosy, Chris Hertel, RN, BSN, and Darlene Geisler, RN.

Missourian Photo.



DECA Holds Benefit Raffle

The Four Rivers DECA Chapter recently held a raffle to benefit Ronald McDonald House Charities as a community service project. The chapter raffled off an iPod Nano. From left are Leah Kuchem, Hannah Backhaus and Megan Frankenberg, all DECA members.

Submitted Photo.



Program Volunteers of the Year

Carla Kilgore, left, and Alan Klobasa were named the Four Rivers Area Family YMCA's Program Volunteers of the Year. They were honored during the YMCA's Employee and Volunteer Recognition Dinner held Saturday, Feb. 23. Kilgore and Klobasa are involved in the literacy and group fitness programs. Also pictured is Debbie Toedebusch, YMCA executive director.

Missourian Photo.

Women's Night Out

An evening massage, wine tasting, chocolates, games, shopping discounts and more will be held Friday, March 28, at Zuzu's in Downtown Washington to benefit ALIVE, Alternatives to Living in Violent Environments. Hours are 5-7 p.m. and 7:30-9:30 p.m. Tickets are \$40 each. Sponsorships are available for \$100, which includes two tickets plus a gift, and \$200, which includes four tickets plus a gift. To make a reservation, mail payment to ALIVE, P.O. Box 223, Union, MO 63084, or call 636-583-9863.

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