



The Nature Institute receives national recognition as Certified Nature Explore Classroom

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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GODFREY - The Nature Institute (TNI) has been nationally recognized as a **Certified Nature Explore Classroom** from the **Nature Explore Program**, which is a collaboration of **Dimensions Educational Research Foundation** and the **Arbor Day Foundation**.

That certification gives TNI several benefits, including membership in an expanding network of more than 355 similar spaces nationwide. The certification is based on "fostering highly-effective, nature-based outdoor learning. These outdoor classrooms offer interactive elements such as musical instruments made of natural materials, garden or pathway areas and natural materials for building and creating art, according to a release from Nature Explore.

"The Nature Institute's commitment to providing research-based and nature-rich learning offers a wonderful example to programs and educators throughout the country," **Nature Explore Director of Communications and Outreach Heather Fox** said in a release. "These spaces inspire hands-on activity, creativity, play and plenty of time exploring the natural world."

TNI Education Director Patricia Brown said the creation of the **Discovery Woods** outdoor classroom, located just outside **Talahi Lodge** on **South Levis Lane** has been developing for many years.

"The project has been child-directed and is all age friendly," she said in an email. "The area is a backdrop that supports imagination stimulation; excavate for bones like a paleontologist, make a mud pie at the **Mississippi Mud Kitchen** or build a nest at the **Eagle View**."

She said children could partake in several physical activities as well, including climbing on the **Bobcat Walk** and crawling in the **Whistle Den**.

"Kinesthetic learning at the **Rot Spot** discovering how worms work, how a rotten log decomposes and even a garden in the summer for planting herbs (are all included in the outdoor classroom)," Brown said. "Our Discovery Woods is used for center-directed education for school field trips, scout groups and for campers at our 35-year-old **Discovery Day Camp**. Each area has curriculum used to educate learners, and the entire space is where children can grow and learn socially, emotionally, physically and intellectually during everyday interactions with the natural world. The best part of the Discovery Woods is that it fits with our mission of nurturing an awareness for the natural world through preservation, conservation and education."