



TNI Rolls Out Free, Family-Based, Summer Programming To Serve The Community

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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GODFREY - The Nature Institute in Godfrey is making some changes this summer because of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

For 38 years, The Nature Institute (TNI) has hosted Discovery Day Camp every summer, serving over 400 campers annually, but this year is different.

“We have had to adapt, change, and re-think how best to serve the community. For everyone’s safety, our programming is family-based, groups of 10 or less, and follows CDC guidelines. We want to minimize contact and have parents help ensure kids practice proper social distancing. Thus far, it has been wonderful,” said Rebecca Steiner, TNI Outreach Director.

TNI summer programming is Tuesdays–Fridays, and is run by Nature Institute environmental educators and staff.

“We have 10 counselors, all previous TNI staff, who committed in January, 2020, to work summer camp. After we cancelled camp, we felt very strongly that we wanted to offer these young people a summer job, and honor our mutual commitment to each other. As a result, we built our programming around family needs and an opportunity for counselors to work at least 20 hours a week,” said Angela Moan, TNI Executive Director.

Wild Encounters, Explore TNI, and Storytime at the Skeet Range, are current programs and Adult Hikes have been added for July. “Wild Encounters are activity stations found along the trails. Birding, plant id, and scavenger hunts are just a few of the activities offered daily by our staff. Upon arrival, families should check our welcome kiosk, and see what is on tap for the day...Kids like the surprise of not knowing the activity ahead of time and it brings out their adventurous side,” said Emily Ehley, Environmental Educator. Wild Encounters runs from 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Tuesdays-Fridays.

Explore TNI provides families with an opportunity to explore parts of TNI with a knowledgeable guide, Wednesdays and Fridays 9:30–11:30 a.m. and 1:30– 3:30 p.m. “Families participate in a guided hike, approximately 1.5 miles, exploring the preserve. The morning sessions explore the woods or choose your own adventure theme, and the afternoon sessions are geared around creek exploration and water play. It’s fun, interesting, and educational for all,” said Ramona Puskar, Environmental Educator.

On June 17, 2020, Treehouse Wildlife Center visited and released a red fox on the preserve. Fawns, skunks, turkeys, black rat snakes, painted turtles, and wood ducks are some of the fauna sighted so far in June by our 1,500-plus visitors.

The Nature Institute is open 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., Tuesdays–Sundays, Closed Mondays. TNI is a non-profit, privately owned nature preserve, funded by donations and grants. A donation box is a new addition by the trailhead kiosk and TNI accepts cash, checks, and electronic donations.

What should you bring? A water bottle, bug spray, comfortable hiking shoes, and your phone to take a picture of the trail map and fun things you discover along the way. Check Facebook for daily updates and our website for more information about The Nature Institute.

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