

Edwardsville Children's Museum to Break Ground on the City's First Micro Forest

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EDWARDSVILLE – According to the U.S. Forest Service, 36 million trees are cut down in the U.S. each year. While it can't fight deforestation on a national scale, the Edwardsville Children's Museum has discovered a way to affect real change in our neck

of the woods. Through the Edwardsville Children's Museum Micro Forest Sponsored by Phillips 66, the nonprofit will bring the community together to build a better world for local kids, one tree at a time.

Thanks to a donation of land from Dover Development and Cedarhurst Senior Living and financial support from Phillips 66, ECM will plant 100 trees on Saturday, March 20, 2021 to populate Edwardsville's first micro forest, located along Route 143. The public is invited to lend a hand that day starting at 9 a.m. to help ECM get its new environmental effort off the ground. Interested volunteers or those who wish to sponsor the project can contact ECM executive director Dr. Abby Schwent at education@edwardsvillechildrensmuseum.org or 618.692.2094.

How the ECM Micro Forest Benefits the Metro East

Influenced by Japan's Miyawaki forest restoration movement, micro forests are miniature urban woodlands grown on empty brownfield sites. When native trees are planted closely together, they mature into a diverse ecosystem in just 20 years, compared to the 200 years it can take a forest to regenerate on its own. ECM's goal is to add 100 trees each year over the next 12 years to grow the greenspace into a two-acre forest preserve by 2033.

"ECM worked closely with Forest ReLeaf in St. Louis to identify those native Illinois trees that will have the biggest impact on the area's biodiversity, including Black Gum, Bur Oak and Hawthorne varieties," explains Dr. Schwent. "In fact, micro forests are home to 20 times as many species as non-native forests, including different pollinators, songbirds and animals."

To maintain the preserve's natural integrity, the ECM Micro Forest will not be available for recreational activities. However, it will benefit the community from the moment the first tree is planted by helping to improve air quality, manage stormwater runoff, reduce urban heat islands, and lower ozone levels.

Connecting Kids to Nature Through the Micro Forest Project

As part of its mission to serve the needs and interests of children, ECM will tie the Micro Forest into its new Phillips 66 STEM Forest Exhibit opening Summer 2021. This hands-on exhibit brings the outside indoors, giving kids the chance to create their own woodland creatures, explore ECM's Canopy Tree House, and discover steps they can take to protect our natural ecosystem.

In addition, information for parents and caregivers will be available at the exhibit so they can learn more about the ECM Micro Forest and get tips to selecting the right native trees and plants for their own home mini-forests. More information about the upcoming exhibit will be available at www.edwardsvillechildrenmuseum.org in the next few weeks.

“Since opening our Discovery Garden in 2018, ECM has been dedicated to helping kids grow their love of the great outdoors through free play and exploration,” says Dr. Schwent. “The Phillips 66 STEM Forest Exhibit and the ECM Micro Forest are taking that mission to the next step by not only providing new resources for learning, but also protecting the environment so every kid in Edwardsville can have a healthier future.”

About Edwardsville Children’s Museum: Edwardsville Children’s Museum is committed to stimulating curiosity and cultivating learning at the age of wonder. ECM believes that kids of all ages learn through discovery and hands-on play. All exhibits and programs are designed to build happy and curious learners from ages six months to 60 years. Families are invited to explore ECM’s exhibits, discover its seasonal programs, or become members for year-round learning fun. For more information, visit www.edwardsvillechildrensmuseum.org.