



# Explore The Riverbend: The Nature Institute

by Dan Brannan, Content Director  
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Angela Moan is at home as executive director of The Nature Institute, a non-profit land conservation and environmental education organization in Godfrey. She grew up within walking distance of the Nature Institute as a young girl and she spent considerable time around the property as a child.



“My parents' backyard backed up to the Nature Institute,” she said. “I spent a lot of time walking the trails of the Nature Institute.”

The institute is housed in the old home of Aune and Jim Nelson. In 1982, the first Discovery Day Camp was held at Talahi Lodge on the Olin Nature Preserve. Moan said she is trying to carry on benefactor Aune Nelson's legacy that children should learn about nature and in doing so protect the environment. The Nature Institute held its first day camp in 1982 and have followed Nelson's direction ever since. The camp has grown throughout the years and is very successful.

Talahi hosts many of the institute's education programs. The facilities include an interactive great room, two classrooms, the John Madson Memorial Library, a wrap-around porch with picnic tables, campfire ring, bathrooms and full kitchen. The Olin Nature Preserve and other natural areas at The Nature Institute (TNI) provide a beautiful outdoor classroom, complete with ponds, woods, prairies, sink holes, bluffs, creeks and streams.

The Nature Institute (TNI) is a non-profit land conservation and environmental education organization. Since its founding in 1980, The Nature Institute's board and staff have worked to foster an awareness and appreciation of the natural world through preservation, restoration, and education.

The summer activities include a premier camp for children pre-K through sixth grade. More than 8,000 area students make field trips to the institute each year. TNI also owns and manages over 450 acres of protected land, such as the Olin Nature Preserve, the Mississippi Sanctuary, the Kemp and Cora Hutchinson Bird Sanctuary, and the Heartland Prairie Project at Gordon Moore Park. These natural areas are unique places for the public to experience the diversity of the River Bend area with its hardwood forests, prairies and wetlands.

The Nature Institute is always seeking contributions and looking for grant opportunities. Moan said she hopes to expand the educational opportunities offered at the institute.

Patty Brown is education director at TNI. Tim Schofield is director of stewardship at TNI and actually started while Aune Nelson was still alive. He takes pride in carrying on her legacy with the institute.

“She was fun and very caring about the environment,” Schofield said. “She loved kids and she would be very happy the camps have continued.”

For more information about The Nature Institute, contact the main office at the Mississippi Sanctuary at 618-466-9930 or [info@thenatureinstitute.org](mailto:info@thenatureinstitute.org); or the Education Office at Talahi Lodge at 618-467-2521 or [pbrown@thenatureinstitute.org](mailto:pbrown@thenatureinstitute.org).

## **History of the Olin Nature Preserve**

1969 - John M. Olin deeds 293 acres to the State of Illinois and is quoted as saying, "The property is ideally suited for development as a nature study area, and in my opinion should not be used as a playground."

1975 - The Illinois Department of Conservation conveys the Olin Tract to Southern Illinois University Edwardsville with a reverter stating that if the property is not maintained as a natural area, it will be returned to the state.

1980 - The Nature Institute is granted 501(c)3 status and begins volunteer stewardship and care of the Olin Tract and Talahi Lodge.

1982 - The Nature Institute hosts its first Discovery Day Camp at Talahi Lodge. 1984 - SIUE requests the reverter be removed from the contract so the University can sell the property. Bruce Quackenbush, a local attorney and founding member of The Nature Institute, begins negotiations to halt the sale of the property stating, "The State should not break faith with John Olin and allow the University to sell the property."

1990 - The Board of Directors of The Nature Institute begins work to have the Olin Tract dedicated as an official Illinois Nature Preserve.

1994 - Nearly 25 years after John Olin stated that his property should be permanently set aside as a natural area, his wish becomes reality with the passing of SB 458 which transferred ownership of the 293-acre tract to The Nature Institute.

1998 – The John M. Olin Nature Preserve becomes the 192nd dedicated Illinois Nature Preserve in the State of Illinois. The ONP becomes one of the largest privately owned nature preserves in the state.

