



# Dyken Pond-erings

Newsletter of the Friends of the Dyken Pond Center

Issue 14

Promoting environmental awareness in people of all ages

Summer 2011

Dyken Pond Environmental  
Education Center  
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## Community Mosaic Art Project Begins

The first Community Art day at the Center took place on Sunday June 12th. The first finished piece is now on display. This work is made possible by a grant The Friends of the Dyken Pond Center have been awarded by the Arts Center of the Capital Region. This competitive grant is funding a portion of the Community Mosaic art project at the Center. The remaining portion is being funded by the Friends of Dyken Pond and Rensselaer County.

The project involves the general public and groups participating in learning mosaics and helping to create works of art. The nature-themed ceramic art will hang outdoors at the Dyken Pond Center, creating a permanent exhibit. Interested groups and individuals can contact the Center for more information on how to be included in this unique opportunity to create art.

Future public work times are July 10,14 and 16.

The artist is Tamara DeMartino who has over 25 years of mosaic experience

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## Wilderness education at Dyken Pond

By Dan Yacobellis

It was about 6:30 am and after a pre-dawn walk, the group of 13-15 year old boys I had camped out with were sprawled across the boardwalk and comfy tree stumps of Dustin Swamp facing east and quietly awaiting the arrival of the sun coming over the tree tops.

The day and night before had been filled with internal ponderings of life's deepest questions, making a fire with a bowdrill and nothing but wet wood, a romp through the chilly waters of the lower beaver pond, solo sit spots by the swamp shoreline, debris shelters at solo sleeping spots scattered across the landscape and of course a campfire meal with all the typical joking and camaraderie. But this was no typical outing. These boys were all part of a Teen Boys Rites of Passage group. Some of them had started coming to my homeschool wilderness classes at the Center 5 years ago. Others had never been there before. Although this group has a nomadic nature and we've met in beautiful nature settings from Albany to Greenfield to Shelburne MA., Dyken Pond is the only place that feels like home. Most of these guys can tell stories like spending a night under the rootball of a fallen tree in a rainstorm or starting countless fires with a bowdrill and only the materials gathered from the land. Perhaps you would hear some of the many tales about Grandfather Rock. These would no doubt be filled with loud exclamations and blinding smiles as the memories came flooding out.

Then there's the Leaning Tree (that hangs out over the water at the lake and affords many wonderful lunch seats), or the Suntan Rock, Long House, Porcupine den, Mud pits and the Eagle Perch tree. These are just some of the memorable spots whose natural beauty, wonder or challenges, have become part of the new names given them by these children over the years. I've found that seeing the Center through kid's eyes is one of the best ways to experience it and it helps if you can sometimes allow yourself to be an even bigger kid than they are!

When I started my Wilderness Programs, my mission statement included a line about build-

ing relationships with nature therefore being more inclined to preserve it. I didn't really know how well a place like Dyken Pond, with its pristine, secluded and rustic beauty, could do such an efficient job of that. When my homeschool kids saw the survey markers for the development on the northeast side of the property, their 8, 9, and 10 year old hearts were called to action to protect the land.

I didn't have to say a word and they were talking about ways to buy it or stop development of it. Their arguments all had real heart in them too and without a doubt in my mind, I knew that these were future land stewards.

I love the old cabins there and the history of ownership and usage on the property. The pitcher plants, blueberries, deer droppings on the lawn and aggressive Grouse, all add to the experience for anyone, young or old, who wanders down the trails. This spring was the first time in 5 years that I didn't have a homeschool class running at the Center but, when I want a place to take kids that's nearby but seems like you're in the middle of nowhere, there's no other place like Dyken Pond. I'm confident there will be many more SOLA campers, homeschool classes and program participants who fall in love with nature through their experiences at Dyken Pond.

Let me leave you with this picture:

It's about 9:00 pm. There's no moon and I have 8 kids between the ages of 10 and 13 walking around the northern tip of the Long trail in complete darkness. There are no flashlights allowed on our night hikes! We stop to listen to the sounds of the night. What we hear is a toad over here, some peepers in the distance, the barely audible rustle of leaves as a mouse scurries over the ground. Then, in the distance it starts, first an unrecognizable whining, then another and another until the eerie cacophony is unmistakably identified as coyote song! We listen with our eyes wide and mouths open. Our hands are up to our ears to bring the sounds into clearer focus. Then, as suddenly as it started, it stops. A chill runs up the collective spine of our group as we realize we now know they are here but, will no longer know how close they are!

A few nervous comments and we continue on back to the Fern Meadow where we are camped for the night. The whole trip could be done in 20 minutes but it takes us an hour and a half! Feeling the trail with our feet, following each other by sound and totally undisturbed by cars, dogs, people, lights or any other signs of civilization, we stroll back to the coals of our fire to stoke it up before going to bed.

## News from the new Natural Resource Educator Pond

My name is Megan Myers and I am delighted to announce that I am this years 4-H Natural Resources Educator at Dyken Pond for the Cornell Cooperative Extension of Rensselaer County. I've been a resident of Rensselaer County, at Babcock Lake in Grafton for many years and am thrilled to be able to work and serve within my local community.

I am a college graduate of HVCC and SUNY ESC, and have traveled to more than 11 countries during that time. The most memorable trip that I experienced was studying Wildlife Management throughout portions of East Africa with the Maasai Tribe. I've worked as a Wetland Specialist for the majority of my professional career, and also have become a Certified Sportsman Educator in Archery and Hunter Safety, a Certified Associate Ecologist, as well as being Licensed as a Wetland Scientist Apprentice, and in Wildlife Rehabilitation and Nuisance Wildlife Control. I consider myself an avid outdoors person, where I most especially enjoy picking wild edible plants to cook and share with family and friends, as well as being a pretty competitive fisherwoman!

With that said, this is a great time of year to go out foraging, whether it's in your backyard or on a hike in the forest. One of my most favorite wild edibles as a side dish for dinner are immature seedpods freshly picked from the Common Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*), found in overgrown meadows. These perennial wildflowers are easily mistaken as weeds, but they're a true gem. Pick the immature seedpods off the plant while they are less than 1 ¼ inches long, during late summer.

One way to make sure you are picking seedpods in an area that have not yet matured is to open up a couple pods and look inside. You have the right stage of the seedpod if the seeds inside appear completely white, looking soft and juicy. You can easily harvest a bag full of these in an hour or less due to the fact that the Common Milkweed grows in clusters. These seedpods need to be served cooked and are very delicious when sautéed with olive oil and seasoned to taste!

Don'ts when harvesting edibles:

- \* Don't pick along roadsides.
- \* Don't pick if you're not 100% sure of the plant's identity.
- \* Don't pick more than what the plant can reproduce.
- \* Don't consume wild edibles unless you're certain on how to cook them.

In conclusion, please feel free to call me at the Dyken Pond Environmental Center regarding any questions you may have about our fun outdoor programs here, or if it is a general question

## Vanishing of the Bees

Directed by George Langworthy

This very well made documentary traces the dramatic losses of bees by several commercial bee keepers over the last few years. These catastrophic events have caused several commercial bee keeping operations to shut down. The importance of bees to food production is clearly outlined, as bees are responsible for most fruit pollinations. No bees, no fruit.

The loss of bees, called Colony Collapse Disorder, or CCD, is not exclusively a US problem. World wide incidences have been documented. Most notably and well documented has been in France where bee keeping is an ancient and noble tradition.

The symptoms of CCD are the disappearance of most of the adult bees in a colony with no obvious signs of usual bee diseases. The adults leave the hive most logically in search of food and then do not return. It is presumed that they become disoriented and can't find their way home. The most unusual aspect of this phenomenon is that no dead bees are found. They are vanishing.

Although no clear evidence is available, all signs point to commercial agriculture, with monocrops and pesticides, as the most likely cause.

The importance of organic and local bee keepers in maintaining healthy populations of honey bees is stressed. The Friends are exploring the possibility of hosting a screening.

For more information go to

<http://www.vanishingbees.com/>

## Summer Outdoor Learning Adventure

At Dyken Pond

Every summer from July through August, Dyken Pond Environmental Education Center holds a summer camp called the Summer Outdoor Learning Adventure (SOLA). This is a nature day camp where each session is one week and kids can come explore nature through activities in outdoor living skills, ecology, plants and wildlife, pond studies and wilderness hikes. During these activities students will have the chance to bring themselves closer to the natural world and interact with many different types of habitats. On Survival Skills day, the campers will spend the entire day at our lean-to participating in shelter building, fire building, and camouflage games where you must find a place off the trail in the forest and blend into your surroundings. One of the favorite activities for the campers is the bare foot swamp walk. This is a unique experience where we explore wetlands feeling our way through with our feet and all of our senses. Campers enjoy it very much! During the last two weeks of camp, older campers aged 11- 14 participate in archery, fishing, kayaking and canoeing, and all day hikes focusing on using a map and compass to navigate through the forest. For more information regarding Dyken Ponds Summer Outdoor Learning Adventure Summer Camp, go to [dykenpond.org](http://dykenpond.org) or call us at 518-658-2055.

Written by Brendan Brady, SOLA camp counselor

DYKEN POND-ERINGS,  
THE NEWSLETTER OF  
THE FRIENDS OF THE  
DYKEN POND CENTER





All photos courtesy of the Pasanen family



The Dyken Pond Environmental Education Center and the Friends of Dyken Pond will host a:

## Community Mosaic Art Project

The Mosaics Project features local artist, Tamara DeMartino, who will lead participants in creating a series of tiled mosaic boards that will be assembled for permanent display.

All supplies will be provided and no skills are necessary. All ages welcome!

Participants will select tile to fit into a pre-existing drawing of nature. There is a lot of room for creativity and enjoying time with others on a fun project that will last for years to come!

People of all ages can work together to create a common artistic vision that expresses their admiration for our local habitat. This format is a great way to connect our imaginations to this place we call home.

**Please let us know if you plan on attending so we can provide enough materials. Meet at the parking lot.**

Future dates to work on the Community Mosaic Art:

July 10

July 14

July 16

The Mosaics Program is funded by The Arts Center of The Capital Region. For more information, contact the Center at (518) 658-2055 or [dykenpond@fairpoint.net](mailto:dykenpond@fairpoint.net)

You can also visit our website at: [www.dykenpond.org](http://www.dykenpond.org).

By



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Center**

**475 Dyken Pond Rd.  
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*We're on the web!*  
[www.dykenpond.org](http://www.dykenpond.org)

### **Upcoming Programs:**

**Community Mosaic Art:** Work with mosaic artist Tamara DeMartino to create beautiful mosaics of animals and plants that will become part of a permanent exhibit at Dyken Pond Center. Tamara will teach you how to work with mosaic tile and use a wet saw.

Please let us know you are planning to attend so we can have enough supplies for everyone. **July 10 and July 16 from 2pm – 4pm**

Past issues of our newsletter can be found on our web site at:

[www.dykenpond.org](http://www.dykenpond.org)



Foxes near Dyken Pond Road Photo courtesy of the Pasanens