

Joining Forces For a Family Fun Day | The Sag Harbor Express



By Annette Hinkle

Ask a parent — there’s something about kids and nature that just seems to go hand in hand. Scooping up sea life in the surf, exploring a woodland trail or digging in the garden are just some of the nature-oriented activities that captivate children on the East End.

So it makes sense that the Children’s Museum of the East End (CMEE) would find a way to team up with local environmental organizations to enforce the message of kids caring for the environment.

This Saturday from 10 a.m. to noon, CMEE hosts the first Peconic Family Fun Day, a free environmental carnival that will educate families and children about water management, agriculture, recycling and environmental stewardship. Joining CMEE in organizing the event is the Peconic Estuary Program, Group for the East End, Peconic Land Trust, Cornell Cooperative Extension and the Peconic Baykeeper.

On Saturday, Kathy Kennedy, education and outreach coordinator for the Peconic Land Trust, which focuses largely on East End agricultural and land use issues, will work with children to rejuvenate CMEE’s vegetable garden for the season.

“We’ll be using seedlings from [the Land Trust’s] Quail Hill Farm,” explains Kennedy. “Maybe beans and lettuce. Easy things for children to handle. We’ll also do a little cultivation and weeding.

“Children naturally have a curiosity about plants and the earth, worms and bugs,” Kennedy adds. “Getting children into the garden really benefits their excitement about the environment. I’m hoping we can evoke that response and get some of the parents excited too.”

Though the Land Trust offers between 40 and 50 community programs on its own between March and November, Kennedy finds that collaborations like this one really broaden their outreach in the community.

“This is a one day event,” she adds. “We’ll see how well it goes. If it’s widely popular, we’ll extend it.”

CMEE’s executive director Stephen Long explains that in the last year or so he has spoken to personnel at

several environmental organizations about different programs that could be done at CMEE. It didn't take long for all involved to come to the realization that a joint effort with the museum and all the groups was not only possible, but a great idea.

"They are people we had relationships with," says Long. "Everyone knows the East End is half a degree of separation. We all know each other, we're all doing the same thing, so why not organize something together?" Like Kennedy, Long envisions the collaboration extending beyond a single day if his young patrons are drawn to the idea. He points out that youth advisory groups at the museum always express an interest in the environment. "I'd love to see it become a regular event," says Long. "So much of what CMEE does grows out of the relationship we have with our audience and how they respond to things. We want to see what their response is, how they could envision the collaboration growing or continuing, or if a group of kids would want to meet regularly as part of an environmental club."

"It's a children's museum, it's not about just entertaining kids, but seeing that kids are active participants," he adds.

And active they will be on Saturday. From fish prints, crafts, a touch tank and groundwater modeling, to an environmental carnival with games and prizes, the activities at Peconic Family Fun Day are designed to be entertaining, hands-on, and, most importantly, educational.

"Without being too 'lessony,' it's neat stuff for kids to see groundwater and what that means. It's a colorful model and you can see where the rainwater flows," explains Jennifer Skilbred, an environmental advocate for Group for the East End and education and outreach coordinator for the Peconic Estuary Program. Skilbred notes that working with others in the environmental field on the East End is something she'd like to do more often.

"It doesn't happen enough," says Skilbred of the collaborative process. "A lot of us work on the same issues, and it's great to have everyone focused on them. That was the impetus behind this event. It worked out. Hopefully it'll turn out excellent and become an annual event."

For Kimberly Paulsen, Suffolk County Coordinator for the Peconic Estuary Program, educating parents on how to care for the environment is just as important as educating kids. With brown tide having wreaked havoc on shellfish populations in recent decades, and red tide showing up in local waterways last year, Paulsen feels sending a message that homeowners need to limit the use of fertilizers on lawns, particularly on waterfront properties, bears repeating at events such as this one.

"We want to incorporate fun craft ideas and at the same time have a good amount of education going to parents," explains Paulsen. "I would love to see the outreach grow. We do science, monitoring and restoration but if we're not fostering stewardship, people don't understand why the estuary needs protecting. Even though Saturday is based around children and designed with them in mind, there'll be something for adults to take away and be inspired by."

"There are lots of great people involved in these efforts," she adds. "I'm glad CMEE's now one of them." Peconic Family Fun Day at CMEE (376 Bridgehampton/Sag Harbor Turnpike, Bridgehampton) is from 10 a.m. to noon on Saturday, May 8 and is ideal for children ages 5 to 10. Admission is free. The day also includes a Poster Contest and children are invited to submit a drawing or painting that illustrates what the Peconic Bay means to them. For details call 537-8250.

TOP: CMEE's Executive Director Stephen Long on the museum's boardwalk entrance with (l to r) CMEE's program coordinator Amy Slack, Jennifer Skilbred of Group for the East End and the Peconic Estuary Program and Kathy Kennedy from the Peconic Land Trust.

Popularity: 2% [?]