

Discover Nature

News and Programs
from the ODC Network



Winter
2021



The ODC Network is a collection of ten business divisions with the mission to advance outdoor education and conservation in West Michigan.



FREE ADMISSION—Two Locations!



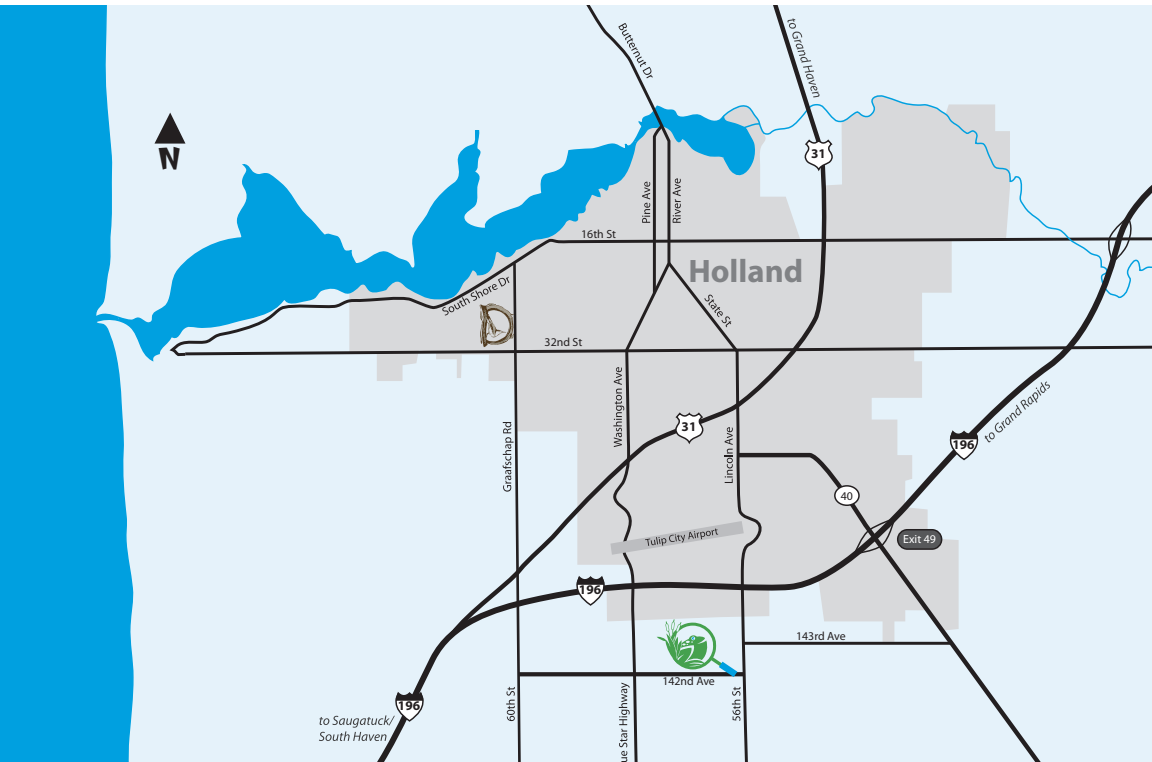
4214 56th Street • Holland, MI • 49423

The Outdoor Discovery Center is 155 acres with about 3 miles of trails, located on the south side of Holland, just south of West Michigan Regional Airport. Admission is free!



600 Graafschap Road • Holland, MI • 49423

DeGraaf Nature Center is 18 acres of forest and wetlands located within the City of Holland, just south of Lake Macatawa. Admission is free!



Discover Nature • Descubrir la Naturaleza

At ODC Network we are looking ahead this year and learning together, alongside the rest of our greater community, about ways we can honor cultural history and celebrate the rich diversity of people. Take a look at some upcoming dates:



“Life’s most persistent and urgent question is: ‘What are you doing for others?’” — Martin Luther King Jr.

Who:
Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday
When:
Monday, January 18, 2021
What:
MLK National Day of Service



Who: Black History Month

When: Feb. 1 – March 1

What: Celebrates the contributions that African Americans have made to American history in their struggles for freedom and equality and deepens our understanding of our nation’s history.

“Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember, you have the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world.” —Harriet Tubman



Who: International Women’s Day

When: Monday, March 8, 2021

What: A global day celebrating the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women. The day also marks a call to action for accelerating gender parity.

“Here’s to strong women. May we know them. May we be them. May we raise them.” —Unknown

Join us for a Program!

We have plenty of fun winter programs planned for you! In order to be ready to adapt as necessary to changing health regulations, we are publishing our calendar exclusively online. Please check for updates on our website, Facebook, and Instagram posts!



Check [outdoordiscovery.org](https://www.outdoordiscovery.org) for updates and program details



New Nature-based Preschool

Among the many changes brought on by this year, Fall 2020 marked the launch of our second nature-based preschool, Seedlings Discovery Preschool. This program was launched as part of a community collaborative aimed at not only increasing access to preschool, but also supporting teacher development.

For the past two years, Ottawa Area Intermediate School District (OAISD) and Hope College jointly operated a preschool in downtown Holland. Over the past year, we have had numerous conversations with the OAISD, Hope College, and a few community leaders with the intentions of creating a nature-based option. By launching this program, we intend to demonstrate to the community that you do not have to be at the Outdoor Discovery Center to successfully run a nature-based



program, as well as serve a broader population by operating in the center of the city.

During this first year of operation, the OAISD will provide leadership and staffing support for the preschool classroom. Eventually, the preschool will be operated by our staff alongside Hope students studying the field of Early Childhood Education. Hope students can be assigned placements, allowing pre-service teachers to learn first-hand about early childhood education and our nature-based program model.

Seedlings Discovery Preschool is currently operating out of a space on Hope College's campus. With the help of Pillar Church, the



Seedlings

Discovery Preschool

program will move to the church campus in January. “We are extremely excited for the opportunity to partner with the ODC, Hope College and OAISD,” Jon Brown, one of Pillar’s pastors shared. “We say we want to be ‘a church for the city’ and this partnership provides us another wonderful opportunity to live into that commitment. I’m thrilled that we are collaborating to pursue the common good of our community and the flourishing of our children.”

Our existing program, Little Hawks Discovery Preschool, started in 2013 as part of a strategic partnership with Hamilton Community Schools. Due to the widespread community interest and demand for the program, we have since assumed full ownership. Since the beginning of Little Hawks, we have

expanded it to a community-based preschool program serving children from all areas of the community. The program operates on the ODC campus and has been very popular since its inception. By launching the Seedlings program, we have expanded our capacity to meet the needs of families in our community.

If you are interested in enrolling your child in the Seedlings Discovery Preschool, or would like to learn more about the program please contact Rachel Hucul, ODC Network’s VP of Early Childhood Education at rachel@outdoordiscovery.org. Se habla Español en Seedlings Discovery Preschool—Spanish/bilingual speaking families may contact Vanessa Gutierrez at vanessa@outdoordiscovery.org.



Migratory 5K Fun Run Held in November



We had beautiful weather and a great turnout of participants on November 7 for our annual run!

As in its name, The Migratory 5K Fun Run is meant to be a fun experience for all ages. The run took place throughout our trail

system and is approximately three miles. At the end of the race, participants were able to get their pictures taken with a live bird of prey and enjoy snacks provided by Crane's Pie Pantry Restaurant and Winery, and warm beverages provided by Biggby Coffee.

This year we were able to raise over \$2,500 toward the care and enrichment of the live birds of prey housed at the De Witt Birds of Prey Center.

THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS



2021 Community Programs

The ODC Network has strived to continue to offer safe educational opportunities for 2020-21. All of our community programs are taught outdoors where participants are in fresh air and have room to explore. Please visit our online calendar to see all of the fun opportunities we offer. We update it frequently and you can sign up for one of our many classes. We continue

to teach some favorite programs such as Knee-high Naturalists, Explore a Story, and Nature for Tykes. In addition, we have a monthly homeschool program, many naturalist-led hikes, bird of prey programs, and more. We look forward to having you and your family visit us!

Calendar & Registration



outdoordiscovery.org/calendar



Maple Sugaring Season

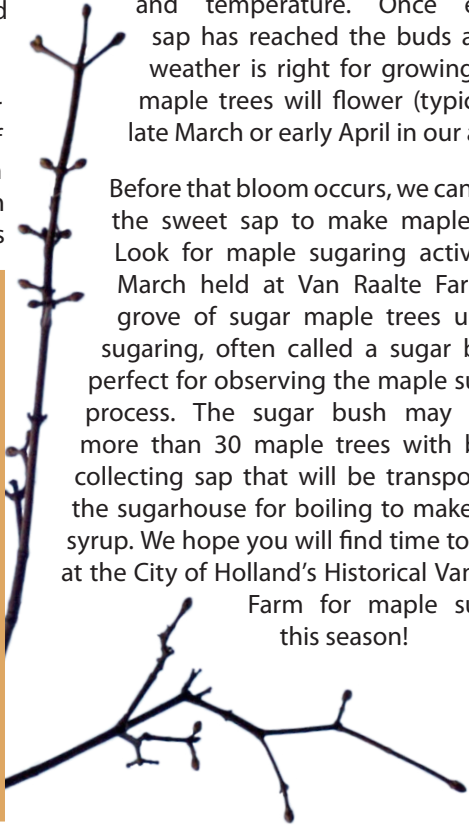
Though the winds of winter are still present and on our minds, the season of maple sugaring is right around the corner. As soon as February you could see the early signs of spring in the buds on sugar maple trees. Unlike many other species of trees, the buds on sugar maples first reveal flowers in March and then are followed by the emergence of leaves later in spring.

The flowers and leaves of the maples started to grow before the tree went dormant in fall. They remained dormant and protected from the freezing conditions of winter by the outer scales on their buds. With only a handful of warming days, the buds will begin to swell in anticipation of the growing season. Sugar-rich water, also known as sap, is sent from the roots



to the branch tips in special water transport cells called “xylem” to provide the nourishment needed for the tree to begin growing. The flow of sap up the tree depends on several factors including barometric pressure, sunlight, and temperature. Once enough sap has reached the buds and the weather is right for growing, sugar maple trees will flower (typically by late March or early April in our area).

Before that bloom occurs, we can collect the sweet sap to make maple syrup! Look for maple sugaring activities in March held at Van Raalte Farm. The grove of sugar maple trees used for sugaring, often called a sugar bush, is perfect for observing the maple sugaring process. The sugar bush may include more than 30 maple trees with buckets collecting sap that will be transported to the sugarhouse for boiling to make maple syrup. We hope you will find time to visit us at the City of Holland’s Historical Van Raalte Farm for maple sugaring this season!

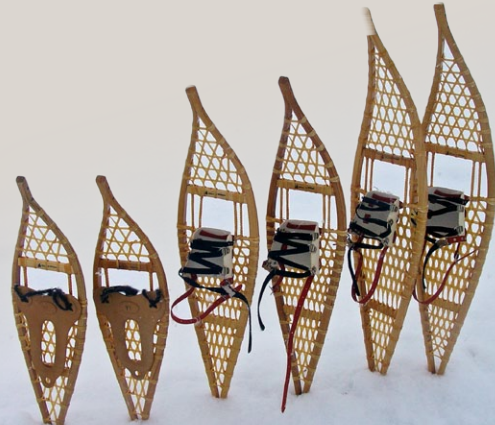


Snowshoe Rentals

Winter is a great time to get out and enjoy the outdoors! Our Ojibwa-style snowshoes will again be available for rent from both visitors centers. Stop by Outdoor Discovery Center or DeGraaf Nature Center between 11AM and 2:30PM if you would like to try them.

- Snowshoes are best for people with youth size shoe 8 and up
- At least 4 inches of snow must be on the ground to use snowshoes
- Children under 14 must be accompanied by an adult

Rental fee: \$5 per pair for anyone 14 years and up



We are moving forward—and we're excited for the opportunities ahead. Be a part of them with us!

Your gift will:

- Deploy our team throughout the community helping schools get outside
- Improve our water quality through innovative projects
- Develop more outdoor spaces for learning and playing
- Supply scholarships for low-income families to attend preschool
- Protect our natural resources
- Help make our community the best place to live, work, play and learn

The ODC Network is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, so community support is incredibly important to our work. Please consider making a gift today—you can scan the code, text the number below, or use the envelope provided. All donations are tax deductible.



Text Give to
616-378-8990

Thank You!

The ODC Network has
provided over

**600
acres**

of nature open to the public



**10,000
hours**

of outdoor
instruction for
school kids this fall



3 Nature Playscapes installed at area schools



Two Dozen projects improving water quality



Seedlings Discovery Preschool



Launched a **2nd**
Nature-based
Preschool

187 students

safely receiving early childhood education
at Little Hawks and Seedlings

Nature Play and Learn Spaces

2020 was another busy year for ODC Network's Operations Team. Our team built a new nature play area at Ridge Point Community Church in May, installed another at Rockford Christian School over the summer, and completed a third at Hamilton Middle School this fall. The end of 2020 marks 12 natural play and learn spaces completed in total, three on-site at ODC and nine at other locations in the community.

Natural play and learn spaces are becoming more popular due to the importance of getting children back outside and away from the screens and sedentary lifestyles that have become prominent in modern times. Unstructured play in natural settings enhances cognitive abilities, reduces stress, improves self-discipline, and encourages imaginative play and active life styles.



For example, by playing on our climbing structures, kids will learn risk management, develop their problem-solving skills, gross motor skills, and communication methods, improve their self-discipline, and discover self-accomplishment.

Socially, time in nature promotes positive social behavior, encouraging children to share play spaces and work together, and academically, outdoor environments improve critical thinking skills. By starting outside education early, children develop a foundation for formal learning, and unearth an innate desire to study the natural world.

The unique set of design and building skills that our team demonstrates has allowed them to become pioneers in the community, both in teaching their skills so that others may create similar playscapes, and providing the types of outdoor learning environments that our students deserve, and require to succeed.



Ribbon Cutting on Outdoor Play and Learn Space

On November 10, we celebrated the grand opening of the Hamilton Middle School Outdoor Play and Learn Space. Project supporters including donors, staff, and board members and two classes of students were able to be present at the event. After brief

speeches and a thank you from Hamilton Middle School Principal, Rick Frens, Hamilton Community Schools Superintendent, David Tebo, and ODC Network's CEO, Travis Williams, the students were able to cut the ribbon and explore the new Play and Learn Space!



A Wetland for the Watershed

Almost every corner of the Macatawa Watershed has lost some amount of wetlands over the years. While the lake suffers from their removal, it is difficult to find suitable places to recoup the benefits they provide. The loss of wetlands means fewer places for floodwaters to sit, fewer places for migrating wildlife to find habitat, and more sediment and nutrients flowing downstream.

For that reason, our team gets incredibly excited when a place becomes available to recreate wetlands. We were able to position a small wetland near the headwaters of the North Branch of the Macatawa River. While just over an acre in size, it will help intercept water from over a hundred acres of adjacent farmland. This will help control water from rushing downstream too quickly, reducing the flooding and erosion risk along the river, and bettering the performance of other wetlands and two-stage channels. We excavated out one to two feet of soil from the edge of a field, moving the topsoil further up into the field and seeding the basin with native plants. A short berm and water control structure along the edge help to manage water within the wetland.



The wetland is located on the property of the GR Brinks Heritage Farm, owned by Wes Koops, the fifth generation of his family to manage the farm. Wes has been interested in how he can make the farm more sustainable and have less impact, including going organic and engineering his own tools and strategies to manage his water supply. By squaring off

the edge of a field along the stream, he is going to be able to better drain his field during periods of heavy rainfall knowing that the water will sit in the wetland, giving it a better chance of infiltrating or evaporating. He and his brother are also looking forward to seeing the wetland habitat grow up, providing an attractive spot for waterfowl, deer, and other wildlife.

We were pleased to be able to include this project as part of our grant through Michigan's Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE). Our thanks also goes out to the Koops family, Niswander Environmental, and 28 Specialties for their help on making this project happen.

See what our preschoolers were discovering last fall!

The mud kitchens at Little Hawks are a place for social interactions and experiments. The mud kitchens provide children with materials to work together, experience cause and effect and try out new ideas. The messy play encourages them to talk about what they are doing and practice communication. We enjoy the most delicious treats from the mud kitchen!



Cooking in the Mud Kitchen:

- Simple Math
- Cause and Effect
- Language Development
- Sensory Development
- Fine Motor Skills
- Investigation



Students worked together to move a branch. This may seem like only a simple playful task but these are the moments that children really begin to understand how to work together. In this moment children learn to take turns, value peers' ideas, and are empowered to be leaders.

The Little Hawks practiced their fine motor skills in October by removing golf tees from pumpkins using hammers and their strong hands. This is a playful activity to strengthen their ability to have small muscles work together for a task while coordinating with their eyes. Young children must practice these skills in playful ways to build the coordination for writing, cutting, reading, and manipulating small objects.



The Little Hawks enjoyed catching frogs at our stream. Do you notice the connections in this picture?

Children are building relationships with each other as they share the frog: this moment illustrates how friendships begin. They are sharing a common interest and taking turns! Also, at this moment children are learning care and respect for nature. Connections on the outside (peers and nature) builds connections on the inside (brain). These moments of connection are wiring our children's brains for new learning and lifelong skills. Thank you, Green Frog, for this beautiful memory!





Education Network Leads in Safe Return to School

As schools continue to work hard to keep children safe during the COVID-19 pandemic, the ODC Education Network has gotten creative to help continue to lower the population density in schools. Joy Funk, VP of Programming at the ODC Network had this to say. "We've asked our naturalist team to be flexible and look at many different ways to deliver outdoor experiences to schools this fall. By doing so, we've been able to continue to deliver on the type of experiences local schools have depended on for years."

Our team of educators and naturalists brought outdoor learning experiences to schools up and down the lakeshore this fall, from Fennville to Muskegon. Bob Wandel, Education Network Manager, had this to say: "The support from the Tri-Cities as well as Holland/Zeeland Community Foundation along with our donors has been amazing. We are so blessed to offer opportunities to help get kids outside during this crucial time. It has been amazing to see the team at the ODC come together and embrace change that leads to positive impact in our community."

Fennville Elementary was part of a summer learning pilot to establish safe return to school programs with the ODC Network. According to Albert Lombard, Principal of Fennville Elementary, "this partnership has been instrumental in the beginning of what we think has been a highly impactful implementation for our school. The efforts we began in the summer have translated into keeping our kids safe while still being able to learn and grow at school. The staff at Fennville Elementary have embraced the notion of meaningful learning beyond the classroom as a way to help kids learn but also a way to keep them safe."

The ODC Education Network is looking forward to continuing to support these initiatives in our area. With the winter coming, we feel it is even more important than ever to find ways to help kids get outside. As long as we can make sure kids have warm weather gear, we can help them continue to learn no matter what the weather brings. The more we can keep kids outdoors and spread apart, the more we can help reduce the spread of COVID-19 during this challenging time.



Two Grants Awarded

The ODC Network has been awarded two grants from the State of Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs (MCACA). The grants were awarded through the MCACA peer review process. We will receive \$50,000 for capital improvements and were one of 123 applications to compete for MCACA fiscal year 2021 funding. Additionally, \$24,000 for operating support will be funded and was one of 307 applications this year.

“The ODC Network is a great asset to my district in Allegan County as well as all of west Michigan and I am so encouraged to see the work they do to connect children and families with the world around them. I appreciate their innovative use of the outdoors as a learning environment that truly provides a creative lens for exploring culture and arts. I can’t wait to bring my grandchildren to see the culmination of this project!” shared Rep. Mary Whiteford.

Since 2001, the Outdoor Discovery Center has provided cultural history education programming to schools and organizations. The purpose of the program is to provide hands-on learning experiences about Michigan history, indigenous peoples, and the human connection to our land. The grant will support the expansion of this program through the development of our new Cultural History Trail. The trail will feature replica structures of indigenous buildings typical of the Late Woodland Period, including two wagingans, a cook house, and a winter house. Journeying through time, another stop along the trail will feature a fur trader cabin. The outdoor exhibits will provide a unique regional asset for schools to meet their state curriculum standards in an immersive environment.



The MCACA peer review process allows for each grant application to be competitively considered by a panel of in-state and out-of-state arts and culture professionals. This ensures the taxpayers, who support this project through legislative appropriations, and all other visitors or residents in Michigan will have access to the highest quality arts and cultural experiences.

A complete list of grant awards around the state is available by contacting MCACA at (517) 241-4011, or by visiting the MCACA website at www.michigan.gov/arts.



Concept Drawing of a Late Woodland Village Replica



Improvements at DeGraaf Thanks to Volunteers

This past summer, DeGraaf Nature Center was a volunteer site for young adult missionaries from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Their tasks included lots of trail work like spreading mulch, trimming back plant growth, and removing invasive species. One of the most noticeable things they did was help with the construction of a new trailhead sign.

We wanted to get to know the volunteers a little better, so we interviewed a couple of the women as they worked.

As Mormon missionaries, the women refer to themselves as Sister Black and Sister Edwards. Both women were born and raised in Utah where they sought post high school missionary work on an international level. COVID-19 changed their plans so they ended up serving here in West Michigan. They are bilingual in English and Spanish and work in the communities where they serve to spread the word of the church.

Sister Black was anticipating going to serve in Argentina after her graduation from high school in 2019. She comes from a family of eight children who live in Bountiful, Utah about 15 miles north of Salt Lake City. Boating and specifically wake surfing on Lake Powell are some of her favorite activities. After her missionary work ends in August of 2021, she looks forward to attending Brigham Young



University to get a degree in marketing. Some day she hopes to visit Thailand to hike and explore!

Sister Edwards grew up in Lindon, Utah which is about 40 miles south of Salt Lake City with five siblings. Hiking in Provo Canyon and Dry Canyon near Lindon are some of her favorite pastimes. She graduated from high school in 2018 and will complete her missionary work in December 2020. Her original missionary work started in Uruguay where she spent nine months but was called back to the states due to the pandemic. When she gets back home, she looks to enroll in the nursing program at Brigham Young University. One day she hopes to return to Uruguay to travel and take in its amazing natural beauty.

The next time you walk on the trails at DeGraaf, give a little thanks to these great volunteers who have helped us keep nature accessible to visitors!

DeGraaf
nature center



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