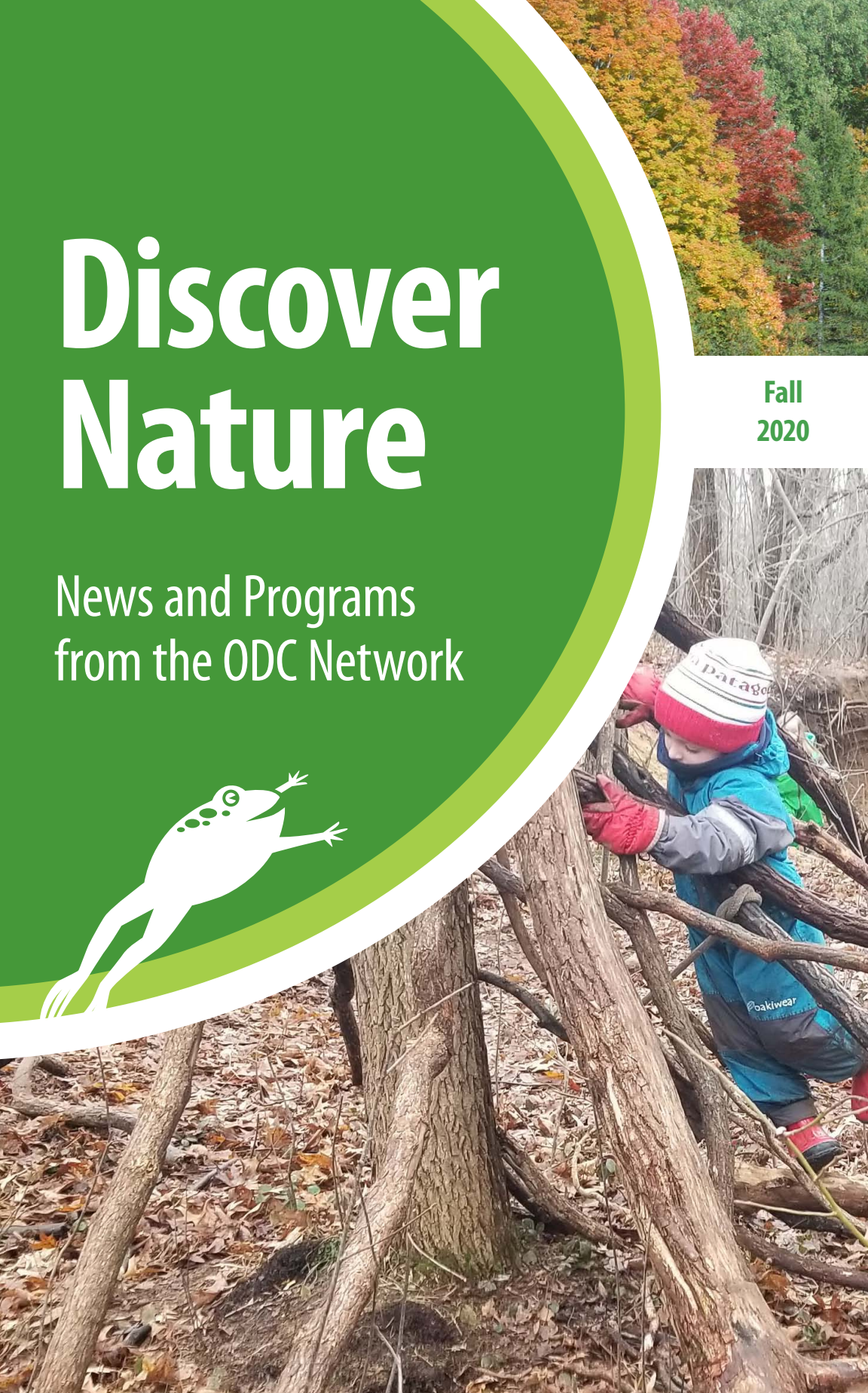


# Discover Nature

News and Programs  
from the ODC Network



Fall  
2020



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**

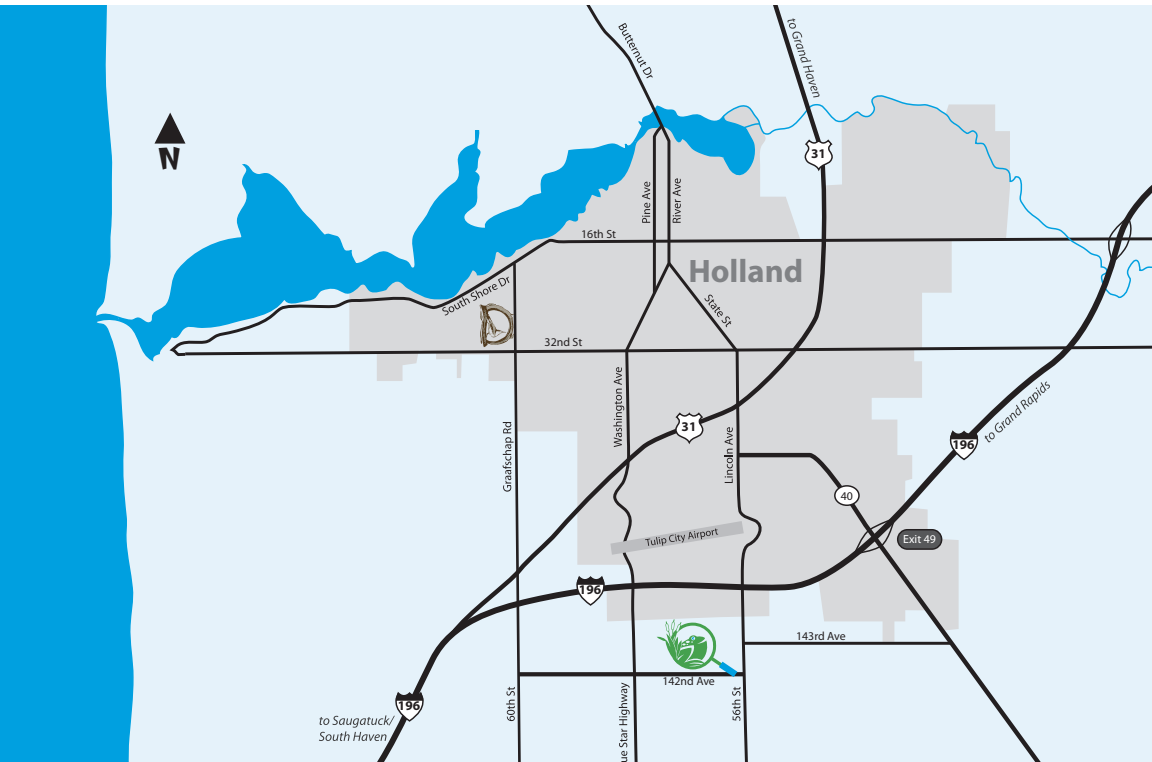


The Outdoor Discovery Center is 155 acres with about 3 miles of trails, located on the south side of Holland, just south of West Michigan Regional Airport. Admission is free!

**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 the ODC Network, we believe that...

We **all** are caretakers of **our** natural world

**People** are happier, healthier, and more satisfied if they have the **opportunity** to enjoy the outdoors.

The ODC Network is committed to creating an inclusive culture. Look for highlights of our efforts in upcoming issues of *Discover Nature!*



### Join us for a Program!

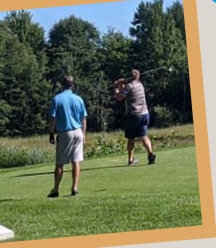
We are doing regular programming again! We have plenty of fun fall programs planned for you, including kayaking, hikes, stories, and of course, lots of live animals. Some modifications have been implemented for the health and safety of our staff and our community. In order to be ready to adapt as necessary 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://outdoordiscovery.org) for updates and program details



Find programs online!  
Calendar & Registration  
[outdoordiscovery.org/calendar](https://outdoordiscovery.org/calendar)

# Social Distance Cup



In the past, ODC Network's summer months would have been filled with numerous events, fundraisers, and other programs to help generate revenue. We lost many of those opportunities and the resulting income due to COVID-19.

To help offset those impacts, we ran a golf outing called the "Social Distance Cup" on

August 19th. We want to thank the Ravines Golf Club who helped make the event possible. We knew that being outdoors was a safe place to be, so we wanted to take advantage of it!

With 30 teams, 26 sponsors, and a number of in-kind supporters, we were able to raise



\$20,000 for our mission. Thank you to everyone who golfed, volunteered, or otherwise participated, and to all of our sponsors! Stay tuned for a 2021 date!



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## A Look Back at Summer Camps 2020

Well, this past summer did not turn out as expected, but the ODC as a whole made the best of a new situation. Our team rose to the challenge of deciding if we were going to hold camps during a pandemic, and how to do so in a safe yet fun environment. With the help of the guidelines from the CDC and American Camps Association (ACA), we developed

strict protocols for our programming staff to follow, and figured out the best ways to keep our summer campers safe while still getting them outside to enjoy and appreciate nature during the pandemic. Throughout seven weeks this summer, we held 21 different camp sessions for various age groups.

Despite the heat and having to stay outside for the entirety of each camp, the campers all had tons of fun meeting live animals, catching insects, fishing, kayaking, shooting arrows, playing games, and many more outdoor activities. We held some of our favorite camps, like Archery, Peek Into the Past, Little Explorers, and Lights, Camera, Animals. We also added some new camps like ODC Olympics, where campers were able to learn cool animal facts and feats, as well as getting active while outside.

We strive to connect our communities to nature in ways like participating in

summer camp, maybe even more so during challenging times. Seeing the campers this past summer enjoy nature safely with the help of our programming staff—and knowing that we were providing them with ways to just be kids—was such a joy for us all. We hope all of our campers will be back next year for more summer camp fun!





## Slower Water Prevents Erosion in a 2-stage Ditch

If we had to describe the main idea we have in mind when our team is discussing Project Clarity projects, we usually ask ourselves 'How do we slow down and store water?' Water that moves slowly is better for the watershed in many ways; slow water has less energy, is less prone to scour and erode, is more likely to infiltrate into the groundwater, and isn't able to carry excessive loads of sediment and debris downstream. Many historic and current methods of using land are designed to move water downstream quickly and dry out once wet areas. Finding ways to slow water down can result in healthier waterways both upstream and downstream.

One way we can slow water down is to install two-stage ditches. These channels are wider than traditional ditches, allowing floodwater to spill out onto benches that slow and filter it as it passes. With our Project Clarity partners at the MACC, we were able to create several hundred feet of two-stage channel at a dairy

farm in Zeeland Township. The cows at the farm had been crossing the stream to get from one pasture to another on the side of a hill. This steep elevation combined with the cow crossing led to severe erosion downstream that eventually wound up at the Upper Macatawa Natural Area. By widening the stream into a two stage channel and providing the cows a sturdier, narrower crossing, we can both slow and filter the water while reducing the risk of downstream erosion. The stream will naturally meander through the channel over time, reducing the need for future maintenance.

We are glad to have this stretch of stream revitalized, thanks to our patient and dedicated partners. The MACC was able to gain significant project funding from the Great Lakes Commission, with design work by Niswander Environmental and Holland Engineering, and construction by Connan Ltd.



In a traditional ditch, large volumes of water can move quickly, bringing large loads of sediment into the Macatatawa River.



In a two-stage ditch, large volumes of water move more slowly, and sediment settles out and is trapped by plants.

# Saying Hello and Goodbye

Spring and summer this year have been a transition for our staff for more than one reason. We are welcoming in three new staff while saying goodbye to four others. Two of our part-time naturalist staff who came to our team through the 2018 partnership with the City of Holland and DeGraaf Nature Center have moved on to new adventures. Carrie Wicker was the primary animal care provider at DeGraaf Nature Center and also a member of our naturalist team. We wished her well as she, husband Josh, and daughter Zoe moved to the Lansing area. Our most experienced and artistically creative member of the naturalist team, Nancy Berg, has decided to retire as a naturalist educator. She will not be gone for good though as we look forward to getting Nancy involved in some of our Education Network contracts.

From the development team, we said goodbye to one of our Development Managers, Tracey Nally. Tracey was an important part of our grant writing team and helped us deliver on our mission thanks to grants and requests she facilitated. Tracey continues to live in the Holland area and looks forward to retirement where she will spend more time with family.



Welcome to the team! Clockwise from left: Vanessa Gutierrez, Leslie Russel, and Joe Sikma.

Little Hawks Discovery Preschool was sad to see Ms. Jill from the Dragonflies, Bluegills, and Green Frogs classes move to the east side of the state. Jill and her husband Austin are excited to start the next phase of their lives as homeowners and soon-to-be parents.

New to our Hatchlings Daycare for staff is Leslie Russell. Leslie has had a full career including a stint as one of our seasonal naturalists in 2019. She is very happy to return to the ODC Network team to care for our little ones! Leslie loves animals, children, reading, camping, and going on adventures with her husband Craig.

Two new positions have been created in the last six months that will become valuable to our team. Thanks to our continued partnership with the City of Holland, we have created a Nature-rich Community Manager position that has been filled by Joe Sikma. Joe grew up in Hamilton and graduated from Calvin University with a degree in environmental studies and business. He specializes in sustainability but is also helping us launch a new website for all of our business lines. Joe and his wife Kristi live in Hudsonville and enjoy exploring area lakes and rivers.

In an effort to embrace change and to reach all audiences, we have created a Community Outreach and Inclusion Manager position. We are excited to announce that this role has been filled by Vanessa Gutierrez, who has recent experience as a Community Outreach Coordinator. Vanessa and her husband are active outdoor enthusiasts who continue to explore the many trails, waterways, and parks in West Michigan.



Happy Trails!  
Counterclockwise from top: Nancy Berg, Carrie Wicker, Tracey Nally, and Jill Babich.



# Creation Ridge Playground



During the month of May, the ODC Operations team installed a new nature playground at Ridgepoint Community Church. Beginning this fall, Ridgepoint will partner with Zeeland Christian Schools to offer a nature-based preschool: Creation Ridge Preschool. This playscape was designed in place to offer the

best outdoor exploration opportunities to Creation Ridge students. Natural spaces help develop key learning and life skills, such as reducing stress and facilitating more cooperative playing with others.

The playground has distinct areas with specific benefits and learning opportunities:



**Sand Area:** Both wet and dry sand allow for manipulation of elements found in nature, and experimentation with molding and building.

**Circle of Stumps:** Standing, stepping, or leaping from stump to stump aids the development of balance, gross motor skills, confidence, and self-efficacy. This circle also creates a gathering and outdoor learning space.



**Water Table:** Experimenting with water encourages large motor play and persistence.

Long, mostly horizontal oak beams have been hand-melded to fit together in a way that prevents entrapment of small hands and feet. These logs allow children to develop their gross motor and balancing skills as well as turn-taking.



A paved, winding path not only provides greater accessibility and helps to orient visitors, but also creates a trail for controlled bike riding.

Throughout each behavioral setting, children are developing their risk-assessment skills and feeding their creativity. Due to permitting requirements, this playscape was

built specifically for use by Creation Ridge Preschool. Another will be built by ODC for the public to use at Ridgepoint Church this coming fall.





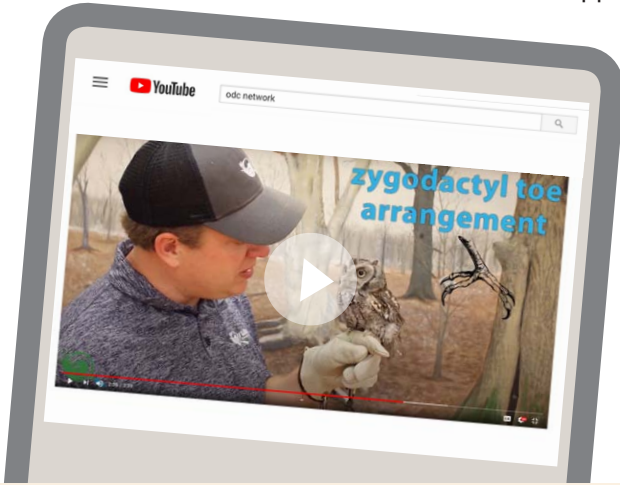
# Connecting Helen DeVos Children's Hospital with Nature

Over the last several months, our staff have been working with the Helen DeVos Children's Hospital to provide videos to children and families. A series of videos were created called, "A Moment of Discovery" that had our staff sharing wildlife. Other videos were shared too, including how to

make Dutch oven apple cobbler at a campfire, making a snake habitat, and setting up mist-nets to catch songbirds for banding.

Helen DeVos Children's Hospital Child Life team member Jeremy Bergman said, "These videos have been great! Loved the baked apple cobbler segment. It fit right in with our food(hour) show."

All of the video content is available on our YouTube Channel! Check it out at [youtube.com/user/ODCMG](https://youtube.com/user/ODCMG) or scan the code below with your smart phone camera.



**ODC Network YouTube Channel**



[youtube.com/user/ODCMG](https://youtube.com/user/ODCMG)

## Support the ODC Network

Whether you are drawn to us because of our education programs led by dedicated naturalists, our commitment to water quality through Project Clarity, our conservation services that manage and restore thousands of acres of habitat, our top-rated nature-based preschool, our 155-acre nature preserve with unique play areas, our Explorer Network trips across the globe, or our role in protecting greenways, we are grateful for your interest!

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!



# Virtual Library Programs

Instead of live shows on-site at libraries this summer, our staff were able to stay connected with many organizations via streamed virtual programming. We saved the Earth from over 300 miles of gas emissions, or the equivalent of driving from the Michigan/Ohio border all of the way to the Mackinac Bridge! What did not change were the fun facts we learned and animals that we got to see during our programs!

Backyard Myths and Legends was the most popular class. Similar to a game of Telephone, stories and facts about animals often change as they are passed from person to person. We wanted to discuss these facts (and correct any misconceptions), while getting to see animal artifacts, in addition to taxidermy and live animals native to Michigan!

Check out some of these myths:

**Can an owl spin its head all the way around?**



Owls cannot turn their heads in a complete circle, but they can turn their head 270 degrees (just 90 degrees shy of the full 360 degree circle)! They have fourteen bones in their neck to allow them to safely do this!

**Do toads cause warts?**

Toad skin and toad pee do not cause warts! But they do contain poison glands behind each eye that can make you feel sick, so make sure to wash your hands after touching them (a good rule of thumb with all animals).



**Do Milk Snakes drink milk?**



Milk Snakes eat mice, voles, and even other snakes—but not milk! They got their name from an old folk tale that warned of snakes sucking milk from cows. Milk snakes were sometimes found in barns, where they hunt for rodents, which probably helped perpetuate this myth.

Another popular program was Turtle Racing. Though turtles are known to be slow and lethargic, they can be surprisingly quick! We read a book about turtles together, and participants could create pennants to support the turtle that they wanted to win!

Many of these shows were recorded and posted on an organization's social media to be enjoyed beyond the event. Thanks to all who participated and watched!





## Looking Ahead with Explorer Network

Though plans changed for our trips in 2020, we are looking ahead to a number of unique experiences lead by our staff. If you would like to learn more about immersive experiences in Tanzania, Alaska, Southern Florida, Ecuador, Costa Rica, Isle Royale and more in 2021 and 2022, please contact us at [explore@outdoordiscovery.org](mailto:explore@outdoordiscovery.org). Plans are being made now to visit some amazing bucket list destinations.

If you have not joined us for an Explorer Network adventure in the past, trips are arranged and lead by our staff in conjunction with

experts at our destinations. We take small groups to unique spots and provide moments that will last a lifetime. Logistics like ground transportation, hotels, and food are included so that all you have to do is sit back and enjoy.

Tanzania Safari | May 7–21, 2021

Alaskan Adventure | Aug 28–Sept 8, 2021

Hocking Hills Women's Trip | October 2021

Southern Florida National Parks | January 2022

Ecuador: Amazon and the Galapagos | Feb 2022

Isle Royale | June 2022

[odcexplornetwork.org](http://odcexplornetwork.org)



# Community Programs in 2020

At the forefront of our organization is the concern for safety and wellbeing. During quarantine, our trails remained open as a resource for anyone needing a safe reprieve from their homes. After consulting with local health professionals and in accordance with safety precautions enacted by state and federal governments, the ODC was able to partially re-open!



Summer archery programs lent themselves well to physical distancing, as did our kayaking programs on various lakes and rivers in the area. Year-round classes, such as our *Knee-high Naturalist* and *Nature for Tykes* classes for 3-6 year olds, were amended to provide a safe learning environment for all who attended.

Birthday parties continued as well; some groups opted for a virtual live-stream, and some learned about animals outdoors and on-site! Similarly, smaller groups continued to attend animal and environmental presentations, in addition to events like our celebration of International Mud Day.

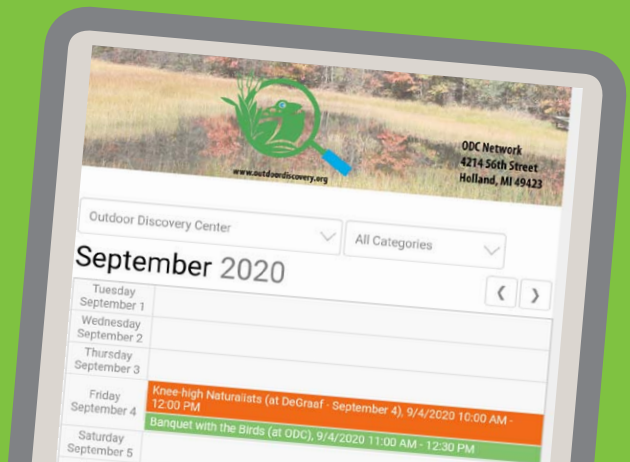
Though it was slightly quieter than previous years, people were still able to take care of their health AND spend time in nature through our programs. Not only does fresh air prevent exposure to COVID-19, but physical activity and time spent in nature revitalize the body and help counteract the negative effects of stress.



## Find programs online!

### Calendar & Registration

[outdoordiscovery.org/calendar](https://outdoordiscovery.org/calendar)





## New Sculpture Installed at ODC

To accentuate the inherent beauty present in our nature preserve, the ODC has installed a unique bronze sculpture titled *Abrazo* (which means hug in Spanish) along with a new outdoor classroom space. The artist, Emil Alzamora, is a British citizen who was born in Lima, Peru, and grew up in Boca Grande, Florida and Majorica, Spain. He originally created *Abrazo* in 2004, but created this version in December of 2015. It was generously donated to the ODC by the Brooks family of Brooks Capital Management.

This 350-pound bronze hug is meant to reach around the entirety of nature, so specific plants have been chosen for the surrounding landscaping to accompany this sculpture throughout the seasons. Yarrow, coneflower, and phlox, among others, will

provide beautiful blooms to look at, as well as food and housing for wildlife on our preserve. There is a familiarity in wanting to protect and embrace every facet of the outdoors that we hold dear.



This installation serves as the backdrop for a new outdoor classroom setting, nestled in our Sensory Trail. It can now be used as an outdoor reading area, an educational stopping point during visits, or just a place to pause and listen to the birds and frogs calling from nearby wetlands.

Art and nature have long been intertwined, and it is difficult to stroll throughout landscapes without feeling an innate sense of wonder. In our daily actions to protect and conserve natural areas around us, we are giving it a hug too!



# Education Network Helps Set Stage for a Healthy Return To School

Since March, the ODC Education Network has continued its commitment to getting kids outside to learn even in the season of COVID-19 in our community. That work began with offering “play and learn” experiences for families in the ODC Education Network Backyard Series. The team created a website that allowed families to engage in outdoor activities in their own home either with their teacher or individually as a family unit. Additionally, the team has been developing and providing ongoing support for teachers in Allegan and Ottawa County to develop ways to engage students in distance learning that takes the child well beyond the screen!

This summer the team has worked to develop strategies and supports to ensure a safe return to school in the fall. Based upon participation in many focus groups throughout the area, we have developed a support framework aimed at helping schools reduce population density in school buildings via offering outdoor learning experiences on a more regular basis. In addition, Fennville and Holland Public Schools have been piloting ways to engage

students over the summer through safe and meaningful outdoor learning experiences that are ongoing with small groups of children. We are also working with Ready for



School in a partnership that is engaging kids entering kindergarten in our area. Through these small steps, teachers and school leaders are beginning to see what opportunities and challenges will be present for the fall return. Most importantly, kids are getting back together, learning safety protocols, and having fun in nature. “We know challenges lie ahead but this team also sees opportunity in the notion that bringing kids outdoors is one of the critical and effective ways to help return to school safely in the fall” says Bob Wandel, ODC Education Network Manager.



## Want to see more?

*Point your smartphone's camera at the QR codes below or type in the address shown*

**Backyard Learning Series**



**Safe Return Framework for Education**



[bit.ly/odcbackyardcrusade](https://bit.ly/odcbackyardcrusade)





## Summer Learning at ODC

For the past two summers during the month of July, the ODC Network has partnered with Ready for School to host Start School Ready, a summer program for incoming kindergarteners in the Holland, Hamilton, and Zeeland area. This was our third summer offering the Start School Ready program at Little Hawks Discovery Preschool.

If you walked onto the campus of Little Hawks Discovery Preschool last summer, you would have come across dozens of children participating in the Start School Ready program. This year, due to COVID-19, the program was offered a bit differently. If you walked into Little Hawks Discovery Preschool this summer you would come across hundreds of boxes! Our team has been hard at work creating summer learning boxes for 75 children in the Holland, Hamilton, and Zeeland communities to do at home with their families. Each week during July, every family participating in the Start School Ready program received a learning box with materials in both English and Spanish. Each child's learning box included materials to explore and create, while also practicing literacy, math, and critical thinking skills. Every box also included food supplies and a recipe for families to create together. One parent said "It's like Christmas... we are loving everything," after her child opened their first learning box.

Families were also invited to participate in a weekly pop up event with ten other Start



School Ready families at either Little Hawks Discovery Preschool, DeGraaf Nature Center, or Paw Paw Park. At these events families could be in community, social-distance style, while also participating in learning activities and exploration in the outdoors. Even though Start School Ready looked different this summer, children and their families were still able to learn, explore, and prepare for their next step—kindergarten!

ODC Network is one of many community partners working together to aid in the kindergarten transition each summer. Hamilton Community Schools, Holland Public Schools, Zeeland Public Schools, Ottawa Area ISD, and Hope College all work together as one big community to give young children and their families one amazing summer! Thank you Ready For School for creating this opportunity for our community to come together for our young learners.





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