

Camp Connects Grandparents, Youth to Conservation

Melody Field spent her childhood outdoors: hiking, fishing, swimming, hunting and exploring. But nowadays, few children are experiencing nature like she did, she says.

That's why Field, who is the Director of the Lifelong Learning Center at Hinds Community College, has created a camp to connect children – youth and their grandparents or other adults – to the outdoors.

“I wanted to provide an outlet for my seniors to spend time with their grands,” says Field, who organizes computer courses and other activities for seniors in the area. Camp Silver Eagle was the perfect venue for uniting grandparents or other adults-children and youth for a week of natural resource activities.

Campers built vermicomposting boxes, learned about watersheds and soil erosion,, created a “lasagna garden” and toured a crop experiment station, among other activities.

“At that age, the children soak up the lessons like a sponge,” Field says.

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the local conservation district participated in the camp. Lynn Porter, district administrator for the Hinds County Soil and Water Conservation District, taught students about worms. They also built vermicomposting boxes, in which worms could be fed newspaper scraps and other items.

“Melody has done a tremendous job with this camp, and the campers really had a great time,” Porter said. “I look forward to working with Melody in the future, and I am confident grandparents will sign up year after year.”

The weeklong camp in July marked the camp's second year. Field said she already has people calling about next year.

“The beauty of this camp is that it brings together generations who discover that they have so much in common,” said Pat Matz, who organized the camp's gardening activities. “Our society has created little ‘techno-geniuses,’ as the children and youth of today sit for hours pushing buttons. Our senior citizens have realized that they don't have anything to talk with their grandchildren about because the seniors are not advanced in technology. Our camp challenges all the generations to think, to act, and to actually speak in words to each other.”

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The camp achieved this goal. Libby Rushing brought her grandchildren to Camp Silver Eagle.

“Everything we did was informative and fun,” Rushing said. “My grandchildren live in the metro area of Jackson and do not get to enjoy everyday life on a farm or in the country. I think it is important for them to have contact with nature and the great outdoors. The more children learn about nature and the environment, the better our world will become.”

NRCS was able to assist with the camp. Reginald Spears, retired NRCS employee, gave campers a lesson in watersheds and how erosion can impair water bodies.

“It is important for grandparents and other mentors to teach our youngsters about conserving our natural resources,” Spears says. “Camps like Camp Silver Eagle are important to educating the youth of today and ensuring they have an environmental consciousness instilled in them at a young age.”

NRCS is developing a new campaign, encouraging seniors and mentors to encourage children to enjoy the outdoors. The campaign, called *Conservation: Pass It Down*, aims to connect grandparents and other guardians to youth. For more information on this campaign, visit www.ms.nrcs.usda.gov.