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Winnetka Village News

Winnetka families connect with nature at campout experience

by Hilary Anderson

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Nearly 50 Winnetka families connected with nature as they pitched tents and camped out Saturday-Sunday, June 22-23, in Crow Island Woods.

For some, it was the first time they had gone camping. For others, it was something they liked to do only this time the campground was close to their backyards.

The event was the combined effort of the Winnetka Park District, BackYard Nature Center, Alliance for Early Childhood and the Winnetka Historical Society.

"We wanted to create a program geared towards families spending more time together with nature," said John Muno, Winnetka superintendent of recreation. "We have beautiful natural areas and parks here in Winnetka. We are trying to increase usage of them."

The camping experience achieved its purpose. The bonding was there. Things were learned. Memories made. Even the weather cooperated.

At first Lily, 9, and Rose, 7, Ingram wanted to just sit in their tent, a new experience for them.

"We wanted to check out camping," said Mother Denise Ingram.

Then the girls answered the call to go on a nature hike. The inside of the tent was intriguing but what the girls saw on their hike was even more so.

"This nature walk was really cool," Lily said. "I saw so many interesting things.

"We are going to tell our friends about it," added Rose.

Jay Vanderlaan brought his daughter, Elle, 4.

"I personally liked the Schmidt-Burnham Log House," he said. "I would like to come back again when there's a program for adults so I can learn more about its history. Elle liked hearing about the baby cradle and how people climbed the rope ladder to the second floor.

A Winnetka Historical Society docent dressed in a period costume made the tours even more interesting.

Zack Weber came with his son, Bennet, 7, because he wanted to be outside.

"This program makes camping so easy," he said. "Everything is provided."

By everything provided he meant the food as well.

Participants had a choice of cooking their meals on the fire pit the old-fashioned way or on a grill. There was a choice of salmon, vegetable and



Winnetka resident Rose Ingram (far right) gets sprayed with bug juice from Mom Denise Ingram, while Jacqueline Wynnchencko (far left) and Lily Ingram watch at a campout at Crow Island Woods Saturday, June 22. *photo:Rachel Wolfe/22nd Century Media.*



Elee (left) and Jay Vanderlaan enjoy dinner at Crow Island Woods.



Winnetka twins Aiden and Aoife Ryan, 5, explore Crow Island Woods at a camping event.

potatoes; or just vegetable and potatoes for vegetarians. All were wrapped in heavy-duty aluminum foil first and then put on logs gathered from the surrounding forest.

BackYard Nature Center's Linn Carey prepared the fare. She also cored apples, made a mixture of cinnamon, brown sugar and butter, placed the mixture in the core area, then wrapped them in aluminum foil. They baked on the fire pit. Twenty minutes later, they were ready for dessert. Hot dogs and hamburgers were available for those who preferred the more traditional fare.

The cooking process provided additional camping knowledge.

Toby Ross, a Winnetka recreation supervisor, showed how to cook in the fire pit on a wood fire, not charcoal.

LLB's Bob Schieley explained which tree woods are good for different kinds of fires when cooking outdoors, for example slow cooking versus a fire for roasting hot dogs or marshmallows.

The event's mission was accomplished.

"We wanted to connect children and adults with nature," said Daniel Kielson, founder and president of BackYard Nature Center.

"There are many places in our area that can teach us so much about Mother Nature. What's even better is the bonding that occurs."

Even the youngest campers had things to do. Robin VanderMolen, president of the Alliance for Early Childhood brought simple, basic toys like balls and blocks to keep them busy.

"No batteries required," she laughed.

Nat Darnieder had never camped before. He came with his son, Nolan, 6.

"I never camped before but my son likes the outdoors so I decided to come and see what it was like," he said.

Ted Wynnychenko borrowed a tent and came with his two daughters, Rosemary, 9, and Jacqueline, 6.

"I have not camped since I was 16 years old," he said.

"The girls are really excited about setting up the tent."

Diane and Sean Ryan like to do family things. After college and before children arrived on the scene, they often went hiking and backpacking in the national parks. All five of their children were on site for the campout— Gabriel, 11, Frank, 9, Abigail, 6, and 5-year-old twins Aoifa and Aedan. The three older siblings were exploring the nature trail while the twins helped their dad set up the tent.

"The twins were born in Ireland," said Sean.

"We like camping and I wanted to show them what American camping is like."

Later in the evening there were guitar sing-a-longs by the campfire. That was Bennet Weber's favorite part of the campout.

"I really liked the campfire and making s'mores," he said. "It's nice being outside with my family."



The Ryan Family of Winnetka prepares their tent at the camp out Saturday-Sunday June 22-23.



Winnetka resident Lily Hermann, 4, explores nature.



