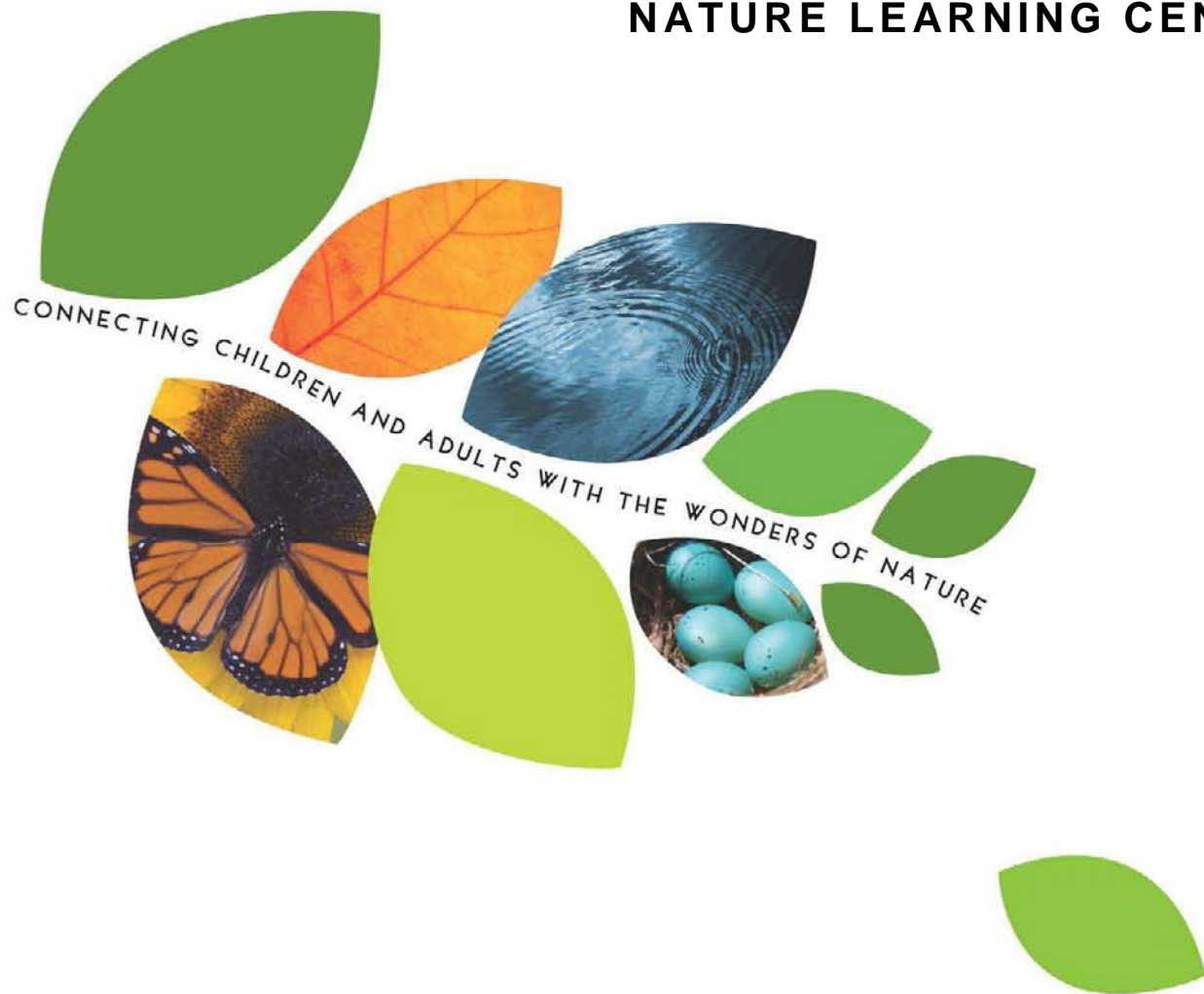




SITE RESOURCE PACKET

STEPHEN R. KEAY NATURE LEARNING CENTER



A green leaf-shaped graphic with the word "WELCOME" written inside in white capital letters.

WELCOME

WELCOME TO BACKYARD NATURE CENTER'S SITE RESOURCE PACKETS!

BackYard Nature Center (BYNC) has selected and described six nature sites in New Trier Township that represent the diversity of the Township's open spaces. It is our hope that these Resource Packets serve as your roadmap to discovery as you explore and enjoy the various parks, managed natural lands, and forest preserves.

BYNC's mission is to connect children and adults, individuals and groups, with the joys and wonders of nature. We believe this connection benefits both the natural world and the lives of the participants.

Each Site Resource Packet offers:

- Road map to the site
- Site map with highlighted areas of interest
- Physical features, e.g., picnic pavilions, restrooms, playgrounds, nature trails, boat access, swimming beaches, school bus parking, restored prairie areas
- Ecological and biological features, e.g., tree and flower diversity, shoreline, bird species
- Potential activities

Please let us know how we can make your encounter with nature more meaningful. Contact us for more information and give us your comments about your experience. BYNC looks forward to hearing from you!

An orange leaf-shaped graphic pointing to the right, containing the word "HISTORY" in white capital letters.

HISTORY

HISTORY OF THE KEAY CENTER

Just between the busy intersection of Skokie Blvd (U.S. Route 41) and Hibbard Road is a 4.6 acre secluded nature preserve. The site was purchased by the Wilmette Park District in 1974 with a matching grant from the Illinois Department of Conservation (now the Department of Natural Resources). Construction of the site began in 1980 and was completed in May of 1982. Originally it was planned to be a playground, but studies from staff members and local conservationists determined the need to preserve open space. It was dedicated in 1981 and named for the late Stephen R. Keay, director of the Northern Suburban Special Recreation Association. In honor of Mr. Keay, who “dedicated his life to the recreational needs of individuals with disabilities,” this park is accessible to all people, with special needs particularly kept in mind.

AREAS OF INTEREST

KEY NATURE LEARNING CENTER



A half-mile trail winds through the nature center; at a leisurely pace, the walk should take thirty minutes. The walkway is six-foot-wide hard dirt path marked by several observation stations corresponding to an interpretative guide. Along the path are two teaching pads, various benches, and two drinking fountains. A footbridge crosses the artificial pond, leading to a nearby photo area near the pond.

Featured Areas

- A** Area A
- B** Area B
- C** Area C
- D** Area D

AREAS OF INTEREST

KEY NATURE LEARNING CENTER

The pond and waterfall are constructed with lannon stone and large boulders to create a naturalistic feel. The waterfall recirculates the water and an aeration system keeps aquatic life present throughout the winter. The depth of the pond ranges from one to six feet. The overall effect is a scenic water space, with the soothing sounds of the falling water. It is not unusual to see aquatic wildlife: turtles, frogs, water birds, as well as fish.

The water hosts a number of fresh water fish including largemouth bass, rock bass, bluegill, catfish, crappie and perch. However, fishing and wading are not allowed.

The pond was dedicated to F.A.Cushing Smith, a past Wilmette Board Commissioner, as a tribute to providing his love for nature to everyone, especially children. Throughout much of the park are plaques at the base of trees dedicated to some group or individual.

The northeast section of Keay is less groomed than the rest of the park. It is marked with many species of trees and shrubs growing together naturally. This area is also where invasive plants can be found, particularly garlic mustard.

STEPHEN R. KEAY NATURE LEARNING CENTER
 SKOKIE AND HIBBARD ROAD



For information and program availability, contact the Wilmette Park District, 1200 Wilmette Avenue, Wilmette, Illinois 60091 (312-256-6100).

**AREAS
OF INTEREST**

KEY NATURE LEARNING CENTER

SUMMARY

Access

On-site parking/roadside parking along Hibbard Rd.

Map Areas

D

General Features

Walking path with trail markers

ABC

Pond

A

Open space – minimal grassy areas adjacent to path

C

Benches and water fountains

ABC

Port-a-Potty

D

Ecological Features

Combination of natural and groomed areas; both native and exotic trees

ABC

Some wildflowers and native grasses are present

BC

Biological Features

Aquatic life in pond

A

Managed and unmanaged woodland areas

C

Local animals present

ABC

AREAS
OF INTEREST

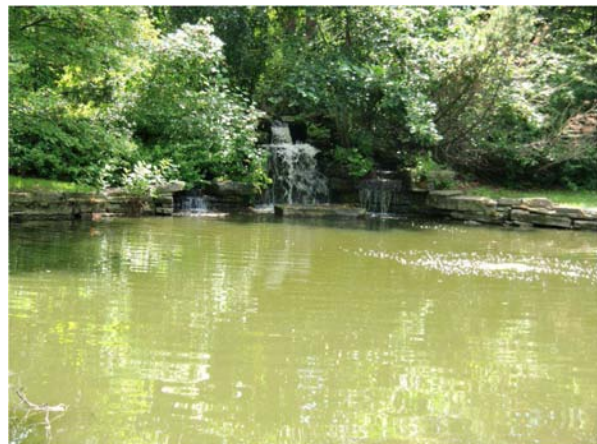
Area D: Entrance to the Keay Nature Learning Center

Welcome to a hidden nature oasis on the west side of Wilmette. This inviting entrance will lead you into a quiet contemplative natural park with beautiful native and ornamental trees and with a serene water feature. Accessible and school bus parking are available.



Areas A, B, and C: General Features

Listen to the sounds of the pond. What animals do you hear? What animals live here year round and which come to visit?



AREAS OF INTEREST

Areas A, B, and C: Ecological Features

Can you name this tree? Why do you find this tree planted next to water? Are there other interesting facts about this tree? What other trees can you identify? (Hint: crimson maples, hackberry, cottonwood, and of course, oaks ... but what species of oak?)



The goldenrod is a common prairie plant that also grows in the woodlands. What insects like to visit this plant? What do we know about the roots of this plant? Contrary to popular belief, the pollen of goldenrod does not produce an allergic reaction ... so, no sneezing allowed!

Area D: Facilities (Port-a-Potty)



For those of you who can't wait to get home, or back to school, there are clean facilities on site.

A red, leaf-shaped graphic containing the text "READING & ACTIVITIES" in white, uppercase letters.

READING &
ACTIVITIES

FOR FURTHER READING

Wilmette Park District official site: Keay Nature Learning Center

<http://www.wilmettepark.org/stephen-r-keay-nature>

“A Guide to the Stephen R. Keay Nature Learning Center.” Wilmette Park District pamphlet.

Ann Meara. (June 7, 2009). “Outdoors on the Shore: Hiatus Near the Highway.” *Triblocal*

[Walter G. Zyznieuski](#) and [George S. Zyznieuski](#). (2002). *A Guide To Illinois Nature Centers & Interpretive Trails: 132 Family - Friendly and Accessible Nature Sites in Illinois*. Southern Illinois University Press.