

Educators, Teachers Connect with KDT

By Holly B. Kazarinoff

Kids Discover the Trail! (KDT) is a partnership of the Ithaca Public Education Initiative (IPEI), the Ithaca City School District (ICSD) and the Discovery Trail. They collaboratively work to offer this program providing elementary school students a means to discover the world—right here in Tompkins County—and to gain experiences that inspire them to become more engaged students, better critical thinkers and lifelong learners.

Each of the 2,900 students in the ICSD's eight elementary schools (pre-K through grade 5) goes on a field trip each year that coordinates with their grade level learning goals, to one of the eight world-class venues of the Discovery Trail: Cayuga Nature Center, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Cornell Plantations, Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Museum of the Earth at PRI (Paleontological Research Institute), Sciencenter, The History Center in Tompkins County, and Tompkins County Public Library.

Funding for KDT trips and other related activities do not come from children selling gift wrap or PTA bake sales, or from family contributions. The costs are fully covered by local foundations, businesses, individuals and the ICSD itself, in recognition of KDT's importance and value.

Students certainly profit from these hands-on learning experiences. No matter what school they attend, or which teacher they have, each child has the opportunity to be immersed in an exciting and meaningful full-day adventure that enhances the content covered in the



Carole West of the History Center in Tompkins County meets with Ithaca fourth-grade teachers to discuss this year's visits to the Eight Square Schoolhouse as part of Kids Discover the Trail's 10th anniversary cycle.

classroom.

But KDT is also about the adults, including the ICSD school teachers, and the staff educators and directors of the eight Discovery Trail sites. Together they work with the children during the field trips and pre- and post-trip activities, which give them many connection points from which they derive benefits.

"I love connecting with the other teachers! We talk about the trips including the kids' excitement in sharing about their trips with their 'buddies' in the other class," says Jenny Emerson, Fall Creek Elementary School fourth-grade teacher.

To make it easier for teachers and educators to connect before each cycle of trips, there is one annual afterschool gathering at the Northeast Elementary School for the 150 adults who work together to meet in one place. After greeting friends, partaking in delicious

snacks, and hearing some inspirational words; the teachers are divided into grade levels and meet with their site's educators to share what's working well and what could be done differently.

Samantha Lesser, staff educator at the Museum of the Earth, says, "I first met with three first-grade teachers to discuss improvements to our KDT program. Thanks to their input, we are changing aspects of the program to make it more interactive for the students and allow them a more immersive experience at the museum."

Emily Cotman, staff educator at the Sciencenter says, "Working with teachers and directors from other institutions allow me to see how what we do at the Sciencenter complements and builds upon all of the other educational opportunities that kids have."

The Discovery Trail educators

also meet regularly to discuss their respective programs and how they can work together to improve them.

"I am so excited to be collaborating on something new with fellow educator Samantha Lesser from PRI. We are designing joint training sessions for our respective KDT volunteers around the topic of plant evolution," says Raylene Ludgate of Cornell Plantations.

Carole West of the History Center in Tompkins County adds, "Meeting with the other Discovery Trail educators on a regular basis keeps me not only informed, but motivated. We are a group who share common experiences and goals for the students and teachers."

KDT is an example of adults working together to strengthen learning for children, both in and out of the classroom. "The KDT program epitomizes our unrelenting goals of community and learning here in Ithaca," says Ithaca High School Principal Jason Trumble.

Since KDT was created over 10 years ago, students now arrive at Ithaca High with more shared experiences and more relationships with others across the diverse district.

In addition, Kelly Craft, Beverly J. Martin Elementary School pre-K teacher says, "I learn new strategies and ideas for my practice by collaborating with colleagues. When we work together, the creativity is stronger and we can bounce ideas back and forth to make the experience even richer. Our Discovery Trail partners benefit as do my ICSD ones."

Holly B. Kazarinoff is the coordinator of cooperative enrichment services at TST BOCES and is a member of the KDT Steering Committee.

Darwin Days 2015

Evolution in Your Backyard

Friday 2/6 Gallery Night, Tompkins County Public Library 5-8 pm	Sunday 2/8 Darwin's Dog Day, 11-2, Cayuga Nature Center Microcosmos, 3 pm, Cinemapolis	Monday 2/9 Panel - "Evolution in Your Backyard" 5:30 pm, Goldwin Smith Hall Room 142 (Cornell)
Tuesday 2/10 Science Cabaret, 7 pm, Lot 10 Cayuga St	Wed 2/11 Trivia Night Felicia's Atomic Lounge W State St	Thursday 2/12 Darwin's Birthday Bash, 5:30 -8:00 pm Museum of the Earth
Friday 2/13 Lecture, Dr. Nelson Hairston, 5:30 pm, Goldwin Smith Hall, Room G64 (Cornell)		Saturday 2/14 Family Day, 10 am -2 pm, Museum of the Earth

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