

Donors Make KDT Programs Possible

By Marshall McCormick

This is the latest in a series of articles about Kids Discover the Trail! to mark its 10th anniversary.

In the last 10 years, 25,000 Ithaca City School District (ICSD) students have visited the seven Discovery Trail museums and the public library thanks to Kids Discover the Trail! Ithaca (KDT) and all of the educators and supporters involved with the program. Over its history, KDT has relied on generous donations to the Ithaca Public Education Initiative (IPEI) by many individuals, foundations and businesses.

Mary Grainger, IPEI's vice president and Development Committee chair, is also a donor to KDT. "We are very glad to support IPEI because KDT ensures that all Ithaca elementary students have the same chances to learn with the educators of the Discovery Trail," she says.

Emma Loiacono, a fifth-grader at Caroline Elementary School, remembers her trips fondly: "Kids Discover the Trail is fun because we get to go places that we might not have gotten to visit with our families. I liked that we got to see that kids from other schools have the same interests, including kids from other cultures. It will be fun to see the kids who were our buddies when we go to the same middle school next year."

KDT is a collaborative project involving IPEI, ICSD and the Discovery Trail. It enables all 2,900 elementary school students district-wide to visit one of the Discovery Trail sites every year

from pre-K through fifth grade. Sites include the Johnson Museum of Art, Museum of the Earth, Tompkins County Public Library, Cornell Plantations, Sciencenter, Cayuga Nature Center, Eight Square Schoolhouse of the History Center and the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. Each student is paired with another from the same grade level in a different school; they jointly participate in both pre- and post-visit activities.

Jason Trumble, Ithaca High School interim principal, believes that KDT aligns with the ICSD's overall goals. "The KDT program epitomizes our unrelenting goals of community and learning here in Ithaca. As a long-time secondary administrator, I continue to marvel at the deep impact KDT has had and continues to have on our youth, preparing them for middle and high school and beyond," he says.

To participate in the field trips, teachers don't have to seek outside funding and the students don't have to sell candy bars or fundraise. It's all paid for by IPEI's sponsors and donors, and the ICSD provides transportation for all 150 trips annually.

"Teachers do not need to be concerned with the logistics of fundraising to bring our students to these great sites," says Julie Wells, a Caroline Elementary School teacher. "Instead, we are able to focus on the important tasks of building relationships between students at partnering schools, the teaching of new content and quality lessons and helping our students truly experience the field trips."

At a per-student per-year cost of



Photo provided

Pre-kindergarten students visit the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art at Cornell, led by museum educators.

about \$30, KDT requires extensive fundraising by IPEI, a registered 501(c)3 nonprofit. Donors can make tax-deductible contributions to support the program. "KDT depends on the generosity of community members and businesses so all costs can be covered without charging individuals for each and every activity," Grainger says.

Most KDT donors are individuals in the community who want to enrich the education of our district's students. Forty percent of the donations received by IPEI for KDT are contributed by about 30 individuals, with gifts ranging from \$5 to \$10,000.

Some donors have been giving for the entire ten-year history of KDT, while others are just learning the

importance of the program's mission. Ann Marie Bleach says, "I love seeing all the smiling faces. [KDT is] doing such great work and accomplishing so much for the children."

Corporate and foundation donors gave more than \$33,000 last year to make sure these trips can continue. Organizations such as BorgWarner and the Adams Foundation have long been supporters of KDT. A representative of the Adams Foundation says, "We are very proud to support such a productive and well-run organization helping Ithaca schools and community!"

Funds raised for KDT cover the cost of keepsake books for all students, programs at the Discovery

Please turn to page 11

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County

Continued from page 1

the attempt to meet both goals will be weighed in making a decision.

One such project is an Energy Roadmap being developed by the county Planning Department that will consider alternative energy scenarios enabling the community to achieve an 80 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, with interim goals to indicate meaningful progress. TCAD will be an active participant in the process and will bring voices from the business community to the discussion.

Another effort is creating Energy Focus Areas. For those areas of Tompkins County critical to the county's economic vitality—such as downtown Ithaca, the business parks and industrial sites near Ithaca Tompkins Regional Airport and Ithaca's East and South Hills—TCAD and Tompkins County Planning will engage NYSEG, the Municipal Electric and Gas Alliance (MEGA), funders at NYSEDA, and other potential partners to evaluate energy infrastructure and devise long-term plans to meet current and future commercial, industrial and residential energy needs while reducing harmful emissions.

An Energy Fund of \$20,000 is allocated by the county legislature as part of the Planning Department's 2015 budget. The Planning Department will work with TCAD to make a portion of this funding available to help businesses considering expansions and residential developers proposing new projects evaluate efficiency and renewable energy options to reduce their carbon footprint while supplying the energy needed for

their business operations.

TCAD, which provides staff support to the Industrial Development Agency, will work with the IDA and Planning Department to create an incentive program for businesses that reduce their carbon footprint as part of a job-creating expansion.

TCAD and the Planning Department agree to institutionalize economic and energy impacts throughout their work, including individual project review and technical and financial assistance efforts—in part, making businesses and developers aware of available community resources and encouraging them to consider energy options as they pursue economic development projects.

"One of the greatest challenges of our time is how we can foster economic growth and also make meaningful reductions to our carbon footprint," stated Michael Lane, Chair of the Tompkins County Legislature. "Only those of extreme views will argue that these twin goals for Tompkins County are not mutually compatible. Rather, the merger of being smart about environmental goals and the promoting of serious economic development is not only possible but is the wave of the future."

"While we would like to encourage businesses to use less fossil fuels, that will only happen if there are real alternatives that are affordable and readily available in the near term" Lane says.

PRI

Continued from page 1

showcases PRI projects with a national reach, such as the Teacher-Friendly Guide series, the Virtual Field Experience and Fossil

Finders.

For now, visitors can explore the museum's newest temporary exhibit, "Quirks of Nature." It showcases the cartoons of science communicator Rosemary Mosco. The science behind the humor is brought to life using specimens, multimedia and hands-on activities. Commentaries by experts accompany each piece, along with Mosco's own commentary.

Materials for the exhibit were gathered from Cornell, as well as both the Museum of the Earth and Cayuga Nature Center. "In a way, this exhibit is a great representation of how well the two organizations have merged," says Beth Stricker, director of exhibitions. Taxidermied ruffed grouse from the nature center are frozen in their eternal courtship stance near a giant bird skull from the museum.

The exhibit also includes a live snapping turtle and spotted salamander borrowed from Cayuga Nature Center. Stricker says that Emily McKittrick, the manager of animal collections at the nature center, trained the operations staff at the museum on the day-to-day care and feedings of their new charges. On a recent afternoon, the snapping turtle was busy swimming, but only a lonely cricket surveyed the salamander's seemingly empty cage. "Unfortunately, the spotted salamander is really secretive and she will probably never appear," Stricker said with a smile.

Summit

Continued from page 2

nins, monitoring pathogens in dairy and breeding maize for higher provitamin A.

One inspiring graduate display outlined the conversion of Petty Island, near Philadelphia, into an ecological and economic hub to address food-security issues faced by the city. According to presenters Akshali Gandhi and Robert Hanifin, the project includes restored wetlands, a food distribution center, an agricultural research campus and space for local food production, including vertical farming. This project was awarded (after the summit) the Better Philadelphia Challenge, an international competition that challenges university-level students from around the world to address urban development issues in Philadelphia and to apply the strategies to urban centers around the globe.

Video clips from the conference will be available. Visit the CIFS website for more information: <http://ipp.cifs.cornell.edu>.

Donors

Continued from page 3

Trail sites and the overall logistics and coordination.

IPEI Board President Jennifer Engel says, "KDT Ithaca is vitally important because it can provide all students with the same access to the experiences maintained by the Discovery Trail. It promotes understanding and respect among elementary students from different towns and neighborhoods by offering opportunities for outside-classroom learning and positive social interaction."

For more information, see www.ipei.org.

Marshall McCormick is an IPEI board member and KDT steering committee member.



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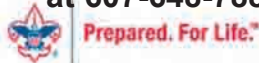
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