

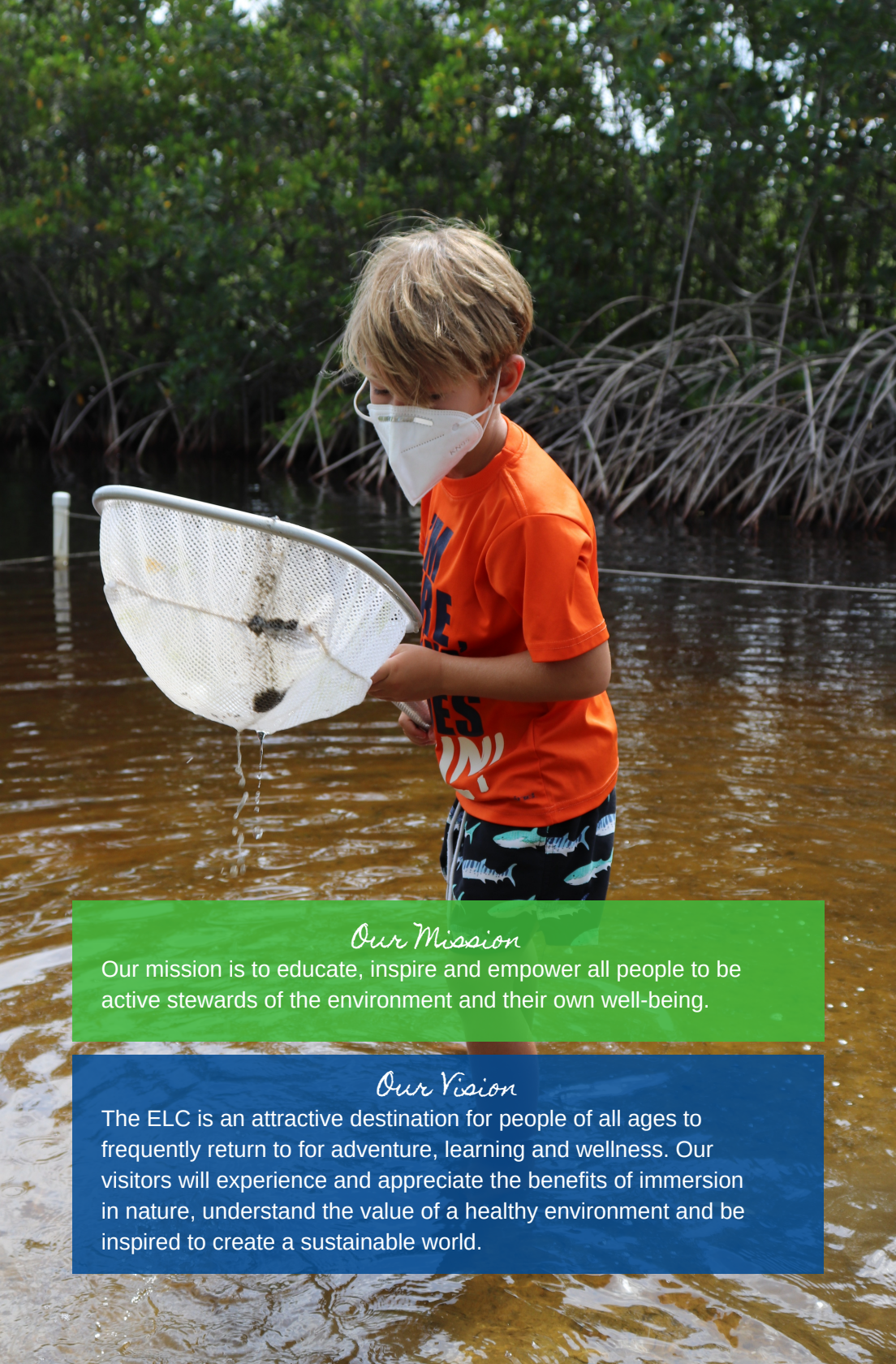


ELC

ENVIRONMENTAL
LEARNING CENTER

Environmental Learning Center
Annual Report 2019-2020





Our Mission

Our mission is to educate, inspire and empower all people to be active stewards of the environment and their own well-being.

Our Vision

The ELC is an attractive destination for people of all ages to frequently return to for adventure, learning and wellness. Our visitors will experience and appreciate the benefits of immersion in nature, understand the value of a healthy environment and be inspired to create a sustainable world.

What We Offer

- Environmental Programs
- Field Trips and Camps
- Interactive Exhibits
- Aquarium & Touch Tank
- Wellness Programs
- All-Terrain Wheelchairs/Walkers
- Kayak & Paddle Board Rentals
- STEAM Programs (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts & Math)
- See Through Canoes
- Facility Rentals
- Community Events
- Pontoon Boat Tours
- Canoe Tours
- Walking Tours
- Over 2.5 Miles of Trails

The ELC fosters community awareness, appreciation and concern for the environment. We promote the use of 21st century knowledge and skills to make informed decisions, solve current environmental problems and prevent new ones.

Not only do we educate people about these issues, we empower people to be a part of the solution. ***Because everyone deserves a healthy planet.***

*We need nature.
Nature needs us.*

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A Letter from our Executive Director



Greetings fellow Earth Lovers, from Barbara Schlitt Ford, grateful Executive Director of our treasured Environmental Learning Center.

I'm sharing this message to give you a glimpse of this past fiscal year from our inside perspective.

Recall that I joined the ELC as Interim ED April 2018 and became the permanent ED in September 2018. In my first year at the helm, together we made great strides toward a flourishing future for the ELC.

This fiscal year was off to a great start in terms of increased program attendance as well as campus visitors, improved metrics tracking, and creative new offerings. We were poised to have a stellar year. About 1/3 of this 7/1/19-6/30/20 fiscal year ended up being derailed by the pandemic. Never one to make excuses, we made the best of the challenging situation. I just want to paint for you a mental vision of our path.

We had announced the pledge that would make possible the creation of the first key piece of our master plan, the Education and Event Pavilion. The community was excited about what this new venue would mean for us all. Just prior to the unwelcome arrival of COVID in March 2020, the ELC hosted a smashingly successful EcoFest with over 1200 attendees. The campus was buzzing with happy folks of all ages enjoying being in the great outdoors and learning more about this fascinating natural world that surrounds us. There was seining and pond dip netting, pontoon/canoe/kayak tours, a drum circle, nature crafts, guided walks, a roster of adult lectures and workshops, and loads of guests enjoying our two nature art collections and our 1500 gallons of aquaria and touch tank, and Discovery Station interactive exhibits. In the Lagoon Room, youth were thoroughly enjoying the hands-on STEAM activity center. Families and friends were exploring our miles of trails and boardwalks. Purchases were being made in our Nature Nook eco-boutique. Our amazing cadre of volunteers was everywhere to assist. It was a huge success in every way.

Likewise in January 2020, we hosted our signature fundraising event Mangroves and Moonlight. Generous supporters raved about how many wonderful things were going on at the ELC and how excited they were for the future. We had completed our 3rd-grade field trips and everyone had a blast and took home critical new knowledge about their connection to our environment and why we should all care about and protect its health.

A Letter from our Executive Director

We were in the midst of our 4th-grade field trips when the news of this community health crisis was revealed.

In February 2020 we had just hosted our brainchild, the first Indian River CARES Nonprofit Leaders Coalition - a Valentine's Day appreciation lunch for the Executive Directors of our fellow philanthropic organizations in the county. CARES stands for Connect, Advocate, Renew, Educate and Strategize. This amazing group of leaders, that does so much to improve the quality of life for so many here, vowed to come together quarterly so they could be knowledgeable about what the other nonprofits were doing and collaborate wherever possible. Little did they know at the time that just a few weeks later they would decide to meet virtually weekly while they supported each other through this unbelievably challenging time to help one another reach the other side. "Together, we are better."

As we all know, in March 2020 everything came to a screeching halt as we did everything we could to protect the health of our staff, volunteers, and visitors. As soon as it was safe to do so, we opened the outdoor campus so that the community had a safe place where they could physically distance themselves outdoors. Waiving our fees seemed like the right thing to do. This was a gift to our residents - the gift of our most valuable asset, our 64 acres of wild Florida habitat on an island in the middle of the Indian River Lagoon.

We cinched our belts and extended our hands. We trimmed our annual budget by 25%. We unbelievably did more with less. Staff worked remotely on slightly reduced hours; volunteers stayed home and hunkered down like the rest of the country. ELC leadership delivered nature puzzles to the nursing homes and assisted living facilities with notes of cheer to let them know they were in our thoughts and hearts. We reached out to our donors and members to see what we could do to help.

Summer camps were sadly canceled. The staff got busy creating new and innovative ways to continue the ELC mission through our unique Nature Near You Kits and virtual outreach programs for schools, fellow nonprofits, and the community at large. Many were provided free of charge.

With the focus shifted from profitability to easing the burden for the community in whatever way we could, we were fortunate to receive PPP assistance and continued donor support while drawing on our Foundation reserves to see us through. Next fiscal year's annual report will reflect much of the same. But we rallied, just as the rest of the country did. We repositioned our efforts toward what was most helpful and important for society.

A Letter from our Executive Director

Globally, the importance of a healthy environment was being spotlighted. Stories about signs of ecosystem recovery as a direct result of the reduced human population stressors of industrial plants and vehicle emissions were spreading hope. People slowed down, planted gardens, spent time with loved ones, and appreciated how convenient their former lives had been.

Businesses (including nonprofit businesses) had to figure out a way to survive if not thrive. While it was certainly disappointing to not end the fiscal year in the healthy financial position we had envisioned and had strategically planned for, we were among the fortunate to firmly survive. We took the time provided to fix up our lovingly worn-for-decades campus, and continued our plans for the brighter days we knew to lay ahead.

We are stronger because of this challenge and we are so deeply grateful to our supporters who have helped us through.

Please know that the ELC is here for you and we look forward to seeing you when you want to relax, celebrate, connect, explore, ponder or grow. We hope that you will think of us as an extension of your own backyard.

Thank you for joining us as we recommit to fostering awareness of the interconnectedness of all things. We strive to instill the understanding that when we humans fail to protect and nurture such a critical aspect of our world as our natural resources that we all rely on to live, the ramifications are severe and life-threatening. Eyes and ears are being opened to this important message. The ELC is here to support our individual and collective convictions to act differently, now, while we can still turn the tide for the health of our shared environment.

With passionate conviction and humble appreciation,

Barb

Barb and your entire ELC family



OUR ANNUAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Highlighting the successes of our purpose-driven mission

Looking Back

July 1, 2019 - June 30, 2020



14,480
Visitors



1,535
Pontoon Boat
Passengers



819
Educator Run
Program Hours



452
Members

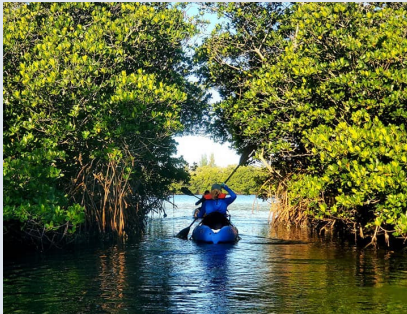


9
Maggie Bowman Fund
Scholarship Beneficiaries



3,401
Educational Program
Participants Served

The indoor spaces and many programs at the ELC were closed and canceled from March through June 2020 due to COVID-19.



Volunteers

“Volunteering at the ELC has been very rewarding. It gives us the opportunity to share our love for paddling and cycling while encouraging stewardship for the environment and personal well-being.”

Matt and Maggie Lechowicz

You Can Make a Difference!

Some Volunteer Opportunities Include:

- Aquaria Touch Tank & Discovery Station Docent
- Campus Maintenance/Gardening
- Roving Nature Guide
- Pontoon Boat Guide
- Greeter
- *And more!*



\$132,518
Total Value of
Volunteer Service



4,872
Hours Volunteered

Want to become a volunteer?

Email volunteer@discoverelc.org or call (772) 589-5050 ext. 107.

Fill out our online application at DiscoverELC.org/volunteer

Financial Statement

Fiscal Year July 1, 2019- June 30, 2020

Revenue

Contributions	\$504,692
Special Events	\$64,092
Programs	\$148,098
Other	\$71,294
Investment Gain	\$69,174
Total Revenue	\$857,350

Expenses

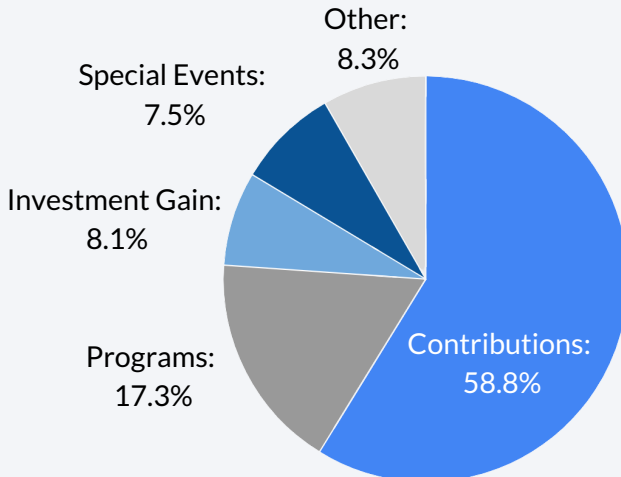
Program Services	
Educational Programs	\$983,001
Support Services	
Management and General	\$235,908
Resource Development	\$173,552
Total Expenses	\$1,392,471

Net Assets

Beginning of the Year	\$6,728,746
Change in Net Assets	(\$535,121)*
End of the Year	\$6,193,625

*Facility closure due to Covid resulted in significant revenue losses for both this fiscal year and the following. ELC leadership responded by trimming expenses 25% and drawing on reserves to cover expenses. During fiscal year '20-'21 ELC now is operating with a balanced budget.

Breaking Down the Revenue



Adapting to the new normal

Nothing could have prepared the staff and volunteers for the challenges faced by the Environmental Learning Center (ELC) after March 2020 and the COVID-19 pandemic. Doors were abruptly closed. Parking lots suddenly were empty. The boats remained tied to their docks. The ELC became eerily still, absent from the daily activity of staff, students, and volunteers. There was no sound of children laughing or of our nature guides leading inquisitive guests through our lush campus. The phones went silent and our doors remained locked. But not for long.

The innovative team quickly pivoted to virtual education and focused on campus improvements. The solitude was short-lived as the leadership team of the ELC simultaneously formulated a strategic plan to re-open the campus. They knew that the ELC provided a much needed safe-haven for the community. At the ELC our family, friends, neighbors and visitors could experience the many therapeutic benefits of nature so desperately needed, especially during this time of uncertainty. Slowly and methodically the campus safely re-opened. The ELC offered its treasures using innovative planning:

- Free admission during the months of March-June, provided guests the opportunity to safely social distance outdoors and experience the healing and therapeutic benefits of nature.
- Lagoon Island Family Adventures created safe, hands-on educational adventures in the absence of summer camps.
- Nature Near You Kits provided at home educational activities for hundreds of children.
- Virtual Events were created to connect people to nature from the security of their homes.
- Through our scholarship programs, families in need were able to participate in programs both virtually and on campus.



With Appreciation...

*A special thank you to our donors.
We couldn't do it without you!*

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*"We make a living by
what we get."*

*We make a life by
what we give."*

Winston S. Churchill



Every effort is made to be accurate in our donor list. If we have omitted or misspelled your name we sincerely apologize. Please contact giving@discoverelc.org so we can correct our records.

Thank you for your support.

Donor Spotlight

Former ELC volunteer and staff Naturalist in the 1990's, David Cox has been an avid supporter of the ELC. The kids dubbed him Dr. Dave when he would lead school groups in the early days of ELC.

He served on the ELC Education Committee for years and helped design and layout the boardwalk system and canoe dock. More recently, he was a member of the ELC Master Planning Group and has conducted environmental surveys, worked on permitting for future improvements to the campus, and serves on the ELC Landscape Advisory and Interpretive Plan Committees.

Not only did Dave dedicate his time and talents to the ELC, but he also was inspired to raise funds for our mission. Dr. Dave's Blue Beard Challenge was created to raise money to support the ELC.



Executive Director, Barbara Schlitt Ford and David Cox

To show his support, he dyed his beard blue!

Our Collaborative Partnerships

Ability Resource Center
Alzheimer & Parkinson Assoc of IRC
American Association of University Women
Anglers for Conservation
Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge
Barrier Island Center
Big Brothers Big Sisters
Boys & Girls Clubs of Indian River County
Captain Hiram's River Challenge Triathlon
City of Sebastian
Clean Water Coalition of Indian River County
Coastal Connections
Coastal Conservation Association
Cultural Council of Indian River County
DIGG Gardens
Eastern Florida State College
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Florida Medical Entomology Laboratory
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Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Comm.
Friends of St. Sebastian River
Gifford Youth Achievement Center
Grand Harbor Community Outreach Program
Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute
Head Start of Indian River County
Home Depot
Homeless Children's Foundation of IRC
Indian River CARES
IRC Recreation Department
IRC Solid Waste Disposal District
IRC Stormwater Division
IRL Aquatic Preserves
IRL National Estuary Program
Indian River Citrus Museum
Indian River Community Foundation
Indian River County Chamber of Commerce
Indian River Land Trust
Indian River State College
Keep Indian River Beautiful
Kiwanis Youth in Action
LaPorte Farms
Laura Riding Jackson Foundation
Leave No Trace
Master Gardeners UF/IFAS extension
Mental Health Association
Moonshot Community Action Network
Oxbow Eco-Center
New Normal Society
Pelican Island Audubon Society
Pelican Island Conservation Society
Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge
Quail Valley Charities
Save the Chimps
School District of Indian River County
Sea Turtle Conservancy
Sebastian River Area Chamber of Commerce
Sebastian Clambake Foundation
Sebastian Inlet District
Sebastian Natural Resources Board
Senior Resource Association
Smithsonian Marine Station
St. Johns River Water Management District
Sustainable Events Network
Sustainable Kashi
The Learning Alliance
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
United Way of Indian River County
Vero Beach Museum of Art
Waste Management
Youth Guidance Mentoring Academy
Youth on a Mission

Community Leaders

Indian River CARES

Indian River CARES is a coalition of nonprofit leaders that initially came together in the spring of 2020, under the leadership of ELC Executive Director, Barbara Schlitt Ford. The goal of the coalition is to build bridges between nonprofits so that they can be knowledgeable about the services provided in Indian River County and to encourage collaboration between community organizations to most efficiently use limited resources.



This coalition also works together to bring resources and speakers to help one another strengthen the staff, board of directors, and processes for the benefit of those they serve. They work to connect community members and businesses with their organizations. They identify community issues and work together to help solve them. They firmly believe that together, we are better!

Environmental Leaders Coalition

The Environmental Leaders Coalition of IRC was formed in 2020, spearheaded by ELC Executive Director, Barbara Schlitt Ford, as means of keeping the various environmental organizations and agencies in the county connected and informed. These environmental leaders work together to make sure the public is informed as to what each group is working on and how we can each support these important efforts.



The resulting collaborations serve to most efficiently use limited resources to make positive impacts for our local ecosystems. The Coalition established priorities with the most pressing being the health of the Indian River Lagoon, as well as restoration of biodiversity and protection of natural areas among a host of other environmental topics.

The ELC Foundation

The Environmental Learning Center (ELC) Foundation, Inc. is a separate not-for-profit corporation that serves as a sole support organization to the Environmental Learning Center, Inc. and manages both funds designated by the board for long-term investment and funds permanently restricted by donors for investment in perpetuity.

The ELC Foundation utilizes an internal committee of financial stewards who manage the Foundation's assets. Through prudent oversight, this Investment Committee has ensured rates of return that have performed solidly over a ten-year period.

Foundation Board of Directors

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John Daniels, *Treasurer*

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Platinum GuideStar Rating

In 2020 the Development team at ELC worked hard to successfully improve our rating from Bronze to Platinum rating from GuideStar, an information service that specializes in reporting on US nonprofits.



We're proud to use GuideStar Platinum to share our full and complete story with the world. To reach the Platinum level, we added extensive information to our Nonprofit Profile: basic contact and organizational information; in-depth financial information; quantitative information about goals, strategies, and progress toward our mission.

Ways to Give

Why Give?

Because everyone deserves a healthy planet.

We all know giving helps others, whether we volunteer for organizations, offer emotional support to those around us or donate to charities. But studies show that giving is also good for the giver by boosting physical and mental health.

So many ways to give...

- Invite ELC to speak at your service club, HOA or business.
- Volunteer. There are dozens of ways to volunteer and share your time and talents while supporting the ELC.
- Sponsor an event or program.
- Make an in-kind donation of goods or services.
- Make a charitable donation.
- Give the gift of membership.
- Create a lasting legacy with planned giving.
- Give appreciated assets.
- Make your mark with our naming opportunities.
- Support the ELC with Qualified Charitable Distributions.
- Make a difference with IRA Charitable Rollover.
- Match a donation with your employees or members.
- Make a memorial donation with the ELC.
- Create long-term stability by giving to the ELC Foundation Endowment.

Email Give@DiscoverELC.org or
call (772) 589-5050 for more information.

Families Unplugged in Nature

Be a Part of the Plan.

Fundraising Goal: \$100,000

We envision a place where children can escape from technology, a place where they can go back to the basics and participate in nature play. Our proposed FUN Zone (Families Unplugged in Nature) will give children the opportunity to have these experiences.

The FUN Zone aims to reconnect children and their caregivers to nature - to feel more comfortable with taking their own adventures and learning about the environment through joy-filled, participatory and open-ended free play.

Physical, emotional and social health is strengthened as children work to resolve problems, overcome challenges and get wild!

**FAMILIES
UNPLUGGED**
in
NATURE



Email Give@DiscoverELC.org or
call (772) 589-5050 for more information.

Epoxy Flooring System

Bring the Discovery Station to Life!
Fundraising Goal: \$35,000

The ELC provides hands-on, immersive learning in our Discovery Station. With over 15,000 visitors a year, the Discovery Station teaches and entertains guests through aquariums, touch tank, and interactive rotating displays and exhibits.

Ecosystem immersion is the most effective way to teach. With our proposed epoxy ecosystem flooring, the entire room would be a learning experience from top to bottom. We are planning to create a total of five different ecosystems throughout the Discovery Station.

Our goal is to provide an immersive, educational ecosystem flooring in our Discovery Station. Imagine our Discovery Station with brighter, artistic, and colorful flooring showcasing the many ecosystem habitats around the Environmental Learning Center. We want to give our guests that immersive experience.



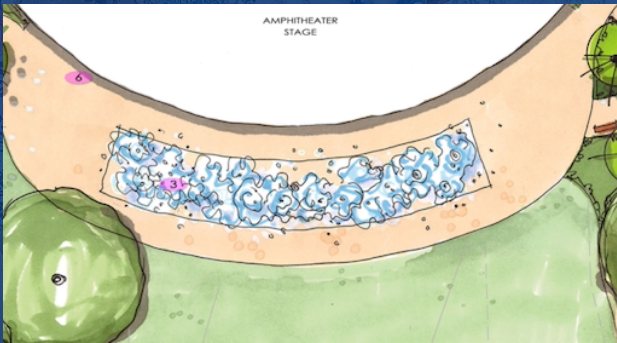
Email Give@DiscoverELC.org or
call (772) 589-5050 for more information.

Splash Pad

Wet and wild fun at the ELC
Fundraising Goal: \$150,000

The splash pad will be the "coolest" addition to the new Thomas R. Schidel Education and Event Pavilion and Oval, allowing children and families to cool off in sprinklers and spouts bursting with water.

The envisioned splash pad will be situated right in front of the pavilion stage and will also act as an entertaining fountain during performances. The mosaic front wall of the stage will be an educational art display of life in the Indian River Lagoon, allowing children to be immersed in a watery world.



Email Give@DiscoverELC.org or
call (772) 589-5050 for more information.

Living Walls

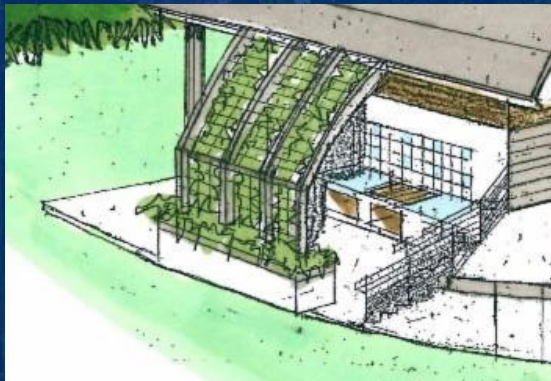
Greening the new pavilion.

Fundraising Goal: \$20,000 per wall or
\$35,000 for both walls

The new Thomas R. Schidel Education and Event Pavilion is envisioned to have two sides of living walls. The living walls, made of native plants, will be both an environmentally friendly addition to the building and a teaching tool for the community to learn the benefits of greening structures.

Living walls are a vertical built structure intentionally covered with vegetation. They help to remove air pollutants, provide shade and thermal benefits to buildings, improve biodiversity, attenuate rain water and improve a sense of well-being.

Your donation to this project will help inspire others to install living walls by seeing the benefits first hand at the ELC.



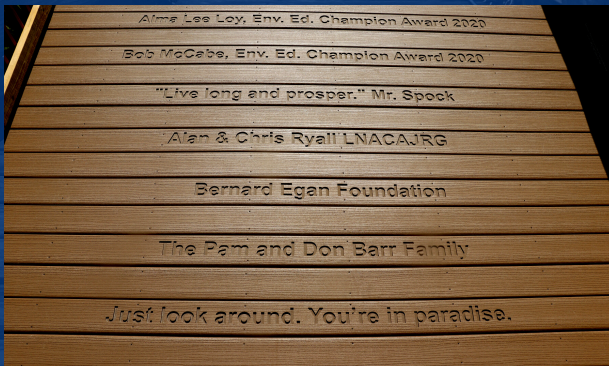
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ELC for ELC

Leave your mark \$1,000 per plank Discounts available for multiple planks

The ELC wants to be the keeper of your memories, and we hope you will help us reshape a brighter future as we revitalize and recover together. Now is the time for us to revamp our beloved campus, and you can be a part of it. People of all ages visit the ELC every year and leave the same footprints on our boardwalks and trails. We want to continue to inspire those people who have walked our campus and share our passion for the environment while encouraging others to get outside and immerse themselves.

When you purchase a plank, you will be leaving your mark on campus while helping the ELC revitalize its infrastructure so we can continue to be the place where memories are made. The Lumberock Premium Decking planks are made to last 25 years, ensuring a long-term investment.



Email Give@DiscoverELC.org or
call (772) 589-5050 for more information.



Our Mission

Our mission is to educate, inspire and empower all people to be active stewards of the environment and their own well-being.

255 Live Oak Drive, Vero Beach, FL 32963

(772) 589-5050

www.DiscoverELC.org

#DiscoverELC