

Achieving National Recognition

In a national study conducted by Mathew Browning PhD of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, along with the Association of Nature Center Administrators (ANCA), nature centers in local communities were examined. The study looked at the relationships between nature centers and the people living around them – including both people who visit and people who don't visit but still perceive value in a nature center existing in their community. Of the nearly 2,000 nature centers that exist across the United States, the Environmental Learning Center (ELC) was one of sixteen nature centers chosen to partake in this peer reviewed study. In each community detailed surveys were conducted including 12,000 randomly selected citizens within a 20-mile radius of the given nature center.

There were four major values identified by respondents regarding their local nature centers:

1. ENVIRONMENTAL CONNECTION

Encourages environmental behavior



Provides wildlife habitat & ecosystem services



Increases environmental awareness & access to nature



Provides a place for children to learn

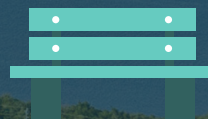


2. LEISURE PROVISION

Provides a place for physical exercise



Provides a place for retreat, restoration and relaxation



Provides a safe place for outdoor recreation



3. COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Contributes to the local economy



Develops a sense of pride in the local community



Makes the community a more beautiful place



4. CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Links people to political action



Helps bring people together from different races/ethnicities



Provides the local community a place to gather



The Association of Nature Center Administrators States, “nature centers bring environments and people together under the guidance of trained professionals to experience and develop relationships with nature.”

Why Now?

The ELC fosters community awareness, appreciation and concern for the environment. ELC promotes the use of 21st century knowledge and skills to make informed decisions, solve current environmental problems and prevent new ones. We educate the public on our major environmental problems such as pollution, global warming, ozone layer depletion, acid rain, natural resource depletion, overpopulation, waste disposal, deforestation and loss of biodiversity.

Water quality is of particular concern. Fresh water is crucial to life on Earth, yet more sources are being polluted through human activities each year. On a global scale, millions of tons of sewage, agricultural and industrial waste and garbage enter the world's water every day.



Studies confirm the impact of the health of our ecosystems on human health. ELC works seven days a week to help people understand the causes of our environmental problems and empowers each of them to be part of the solution.



For once we know better, we will do better.

Nature needs a voice. People are a part of nature and we cannot exist without it. Every living thing, from microorganisms to the dolphins in our lagoon plays an integral role of supporting life on our planet. Everything we need to survive depends on other species; the fate of all of these species is in our hands.

The bottom line is: We need nature, and nature needs us. Now.

Nothing in nature lives for itself. Rivers don't drink their own water.
Trees don't eat their own fruit. The sun doesn't shine for itself.

*Living for each other is the
rule of nature.*

Inspiring forces of nature...

TO EDUCATE...

Once upon a time, a young lady in the 4th grade took a field trip to the Environmental Learning Center (ELC). She experienced Lagoon Days— a hands-on curriculum designed to illustrate how everything in the natural world fits together, interacts and is interconnected, like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. That first exposure to the natural habitat of the Indian River Lagoon through the ELC awakened in her a passionate relationship with nature and the environment.



Our mission



TO INSPIRE...

Our young environmental enthusiast becomes an International Baccalaureate (IB) advanced student at 16 years old. The IB program requires mandatory volunteer hours and our young lady chooses to return to the ELC to fulfill her commitments. She becomes further inspired to work for the good of the environment.

She later enters the University of South Florida on a Bright Futures scholarship. She chooses to study environmental sciences, bolstered by her recommendation letters from the education staff at ELC and her years of environmental experience through ELC programming.

Shaping futures



TO EMPOWER...

The individual whose career path we have followed is 30-year-old Alexis Peralta. Alexis is an environmental Stormwater Educator and Enforcement Officer at Indian River County Public Works. When she's not working on her official duties, standing up for the conservation and health of the Indian River Lagoon area, you can find her at the Environmental Learning Center facilitating programs that provide environmental education and inspiration to young visitors. Alexis says that when she returns to the ELC to inspire others, it feels like a full-circle back to the time she remembers fondly when she was the young person being inspired. Alexis shares that "the strong bond that she formed with the ELC helped shape the trajectory of her future and career."

Alexis is one of many who have been inspired by the Environmental Learning Center.

Encouraging Environmental Stewards



Will Johnson is heading to Dartmouth College with a goal of majoring in the natural sciences- a goal he says was influenced by growing up at the ELC. Will began in the Little Wonders of Ecology program at age four, and now he's a mentor for the next generation.



"We strongly believe that education is the key to preserving and enjoying our beautiful Indian River Lagoon. When children come to the Environmental Learning Center, many for the first time, we love seeing their excitement as they enjoy nature and explore. We brought our own children when they were young and happily share the legacy of the ELC with others as volunteers today," **Volunteers Patty & Walter Gerrard**



Gaining Confidence

"I'VE GAINED THE CONFIDENCE TO PURSUE A CAREER IN CONSERVATION."

"I loved my time at the ELC! There was always something to do! I especially enjoyed being a part of the unique educational experience the ELC offers to local youth. The ELC allowed me to turn my ideas of public outreach into a reality and put them on display in their Discovery Station. By exposing me to environmental issues and professionals working in these fields, I've gained the confidence to pursue a career in conservation," ***Intern Roberto Ferrer***



Creating Natural Connections

The earth and all the organisms that surround us serve as our home. To live, humans take energy and resources from these natural surroundings. Our early ancestors had a connection with the world around them. The plants and animals that provided their sustenance was a ***natural relationship***; one that they felt a part of. But as humans developed more sophisticated technologies, they were able to extract more resources and energy from the world while distancing themselves from nature itself.



Today, humans control nearly half of all the energy available to support life on earth. The United States consumes 24% of the world's resources to serve just 5% of the world's population. The more timber, food, water and fuel we take from the environment, the less available it is to all other species. The impact we have on animals and plants, on inland waterways and oceans, on air and land, is so great that we are endangering the nature on which our lives depend. The Environmental Learning Center promotes an understanding of the inherent need for stewardship of the earth's precious resources.

Creating Natural Connections

Humans control
nearly

1/2

of the
energy to
support life
on earth



15 billion

trees are cut down every year



24%

The U.S. consumes 24%
of the world's resources to
serve just 5% of the
world's population.

16,306

species of animals and plants
that are endangered species,
threatened with extinction

**260
million**

tons of plastic are
produced each year.

10%

ends up in the water.

Enriching Experiences

WHAT WE OFFER:

- Environmental/STEAM Programs
- Field Trips & Camps
- Interactive Exhibits
- Aquarium & Touch Tank
- Wellness Programs
- All-Terrain Wheelchairs
- Kayak & Paddle Board Rentals
- See Through Canoes
- Facility Rentals
- Community Events
- Pontoon Boat Tours
- Canoe Tours
- Walking Tours
- Over 2.5 Miles of Trails

A NATURAL REMEDY

Stressed? Some medical practitioners prescribe time in nature as a free and simple solution to reduce stress. This remedy encourages carving out time in our day to immerse ourselves in green spaces.



JUST 30 MINUTES

out of your day to stroll or sit in a quiet place in nature can significantly lower your stress levels and improve overall health.



Enriching Experiences

Understanding our natural world and our relationship to it is the first step in reawakening our intimate connection to the earth and how vital it is to our very existence. Promoting that understanding is at the core of the Environmental Learning Center's mission of enriching individuals' relationship with nature. Our need to interface with nature is fundamental.

Research on this topic is growing, and science is making it clear that there is a strong correlation between an individual's immersion in a natural setting, environmental values and actions, and between physical and psychological health.

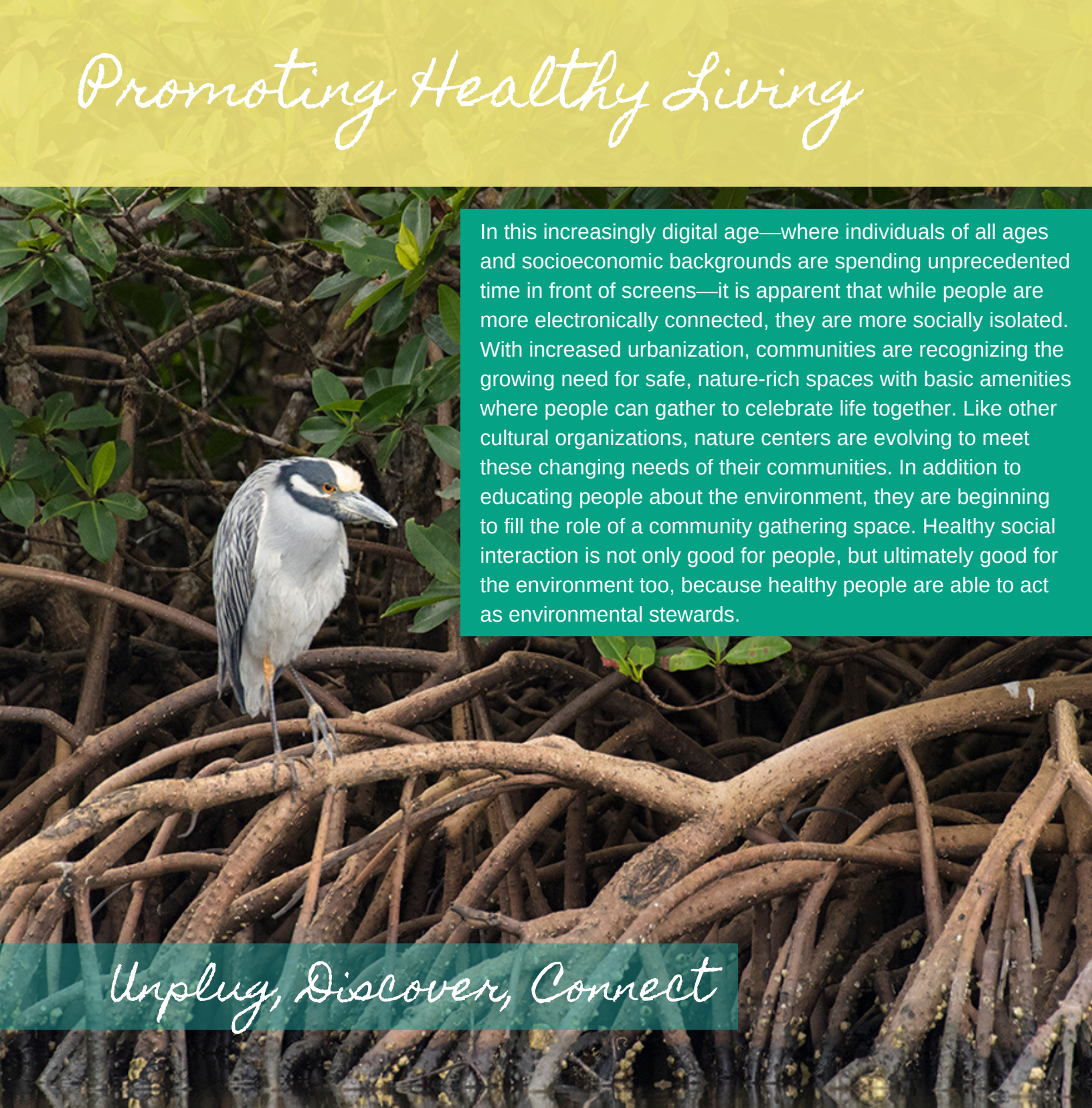
Recent studies show that connecting with nature can:

- Reduce stress, anxiety and depression
- Reduce symptoms of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
- Increase cognitive function and brain performance
- Increase fitness levels and build active, healthy bodies
- Reduce symptoms of dementia and Alzheimer's
- Reduce behavioral problems in prison inmates
- Provide periods of respite in a hurried, technology-filled world
- Provide hands-on experiences showing why we need natural resources for survival

At ELC, we know firsthand the ways that nature helps us. Our mission is **to educate, inspire and empower all people to be active stewards of the environment and their own well-being.** *We're committed to enhancing and expanding ways in which we help people through interactions with nature.*



Promoting Healthy Living

A white heron with a black cap and yellow beak is perched on a dense network of brown mangrove roots. The background is filled with green mangrove leaves and more roots, creating a lush, natural setting.

In this increasingly digital age—where individuals of all ages and socioeconomic backgrounds are spending unprecedented time in front of screens—it is apparent that while people are more electronically connected, they are more socially isolated. With increased urbanization, communities are recognizing the growing need for safe, nature-rich spaces with basic amenities where people can gather to celebrate life together. Like other cultural organizations, nature centers are evolving to meet these changing needs of their communities. In addition to educating people about the environment, they are beginning to fill the role of a community gathering space. Healthy social interaction is not only good for people, but ultimately good for the environment too, because healthy people are able to act as environmental stewards.

Unplug, Discover, Connect

Promoting Healthy Living

LESS SCREEN TIME, MORE GREEN TIME.



Today, the average American spends more than 3 hours on a smartphone per day. Most of this time is spent in messaging, social media and navigation.



In 2011, the average time spent on a phone per day was around 45 minutes.



The average adult consumes five times more information every day than people 50 years ago.



The average American adult spends over 8.5 hours per day looking at a screen.



Outdoor play leads to mentally and physically stronger kids. Children today spend 3x as much time in front of a screen than outside.

*In every walk with
nature, one receives
far more than he
seeks.
John Muir*

Realizing a Vision

The Environmental Learning Center was founded in 1988 by a group of environmentally conscious pioneers from the Pelican Island Audubon Society who lived in our community and cherished the nature that thrives in and around the Indian River Lagoon. They envisioned a place that was non-threatening and filled with nature-rich, hands-on experiences.

Through the support of our community, donors, members, board, staff and volunteers we are able to build our environmental learning and stewardship programs and evolve our mission to bring nature to all, including those with limited means and access to nature. Their dream blossomed, and for nearly three decades, we have taught close to half a million people of all ages, local residents and visitors from across the world, to appreciate, connect with and care for nature.



Founder George Bunnell



Founder Maggie Bowman



First Executive Director Holly Dill

*Their dream
blossomed...*

Realizing a Vision



On the national level, the construction of nature centers proliferated during the U.S. environmental movement of the 1960's and 1970's. This growth was spurred by events like the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, the Cuyahoga River fire and the Santa Barbara oil spill. The citizens of the United States became increasingly concerned about the urgency and impact of environmental issues. This fueled the creation of several regulatory agencies and legislation such as the Environmental Protection Agency, Clean Air Act and Endangered Species Act. These agencies and regulatory acts are constantly under siege, especially in recent years. These concerns that were the catalyst for change in environmental policy are as relevant today as they were at the beginning of the environmental movement. Providing the forum to research, discuss and investigate these important guidelines of ecological policy are at the heart of the Environmental Learning Centers impact in the community.

Imagining a better future

The ELC envisions a world where all individuals from all walks of life are healthy, happy and deeply connected with their local environment.

This is the role of nature centers reinvented: to bring new life to their natural resource assets in order to address current and projected future societal needs and serve as community gathering spaces to help people unplug, discover and connect to nature. Adults and children are unable to act as stewards on behalf of the environment if they are not well themselves, and nature contact is what brings wellness and what brings needed knowledge.

The ELC's goal is to deepen the human connection with other species and to understand how all humanity can live in harmony with the rest of our natural world.

This is the ELC Master Plan. This is ELC's vision for our shared future.



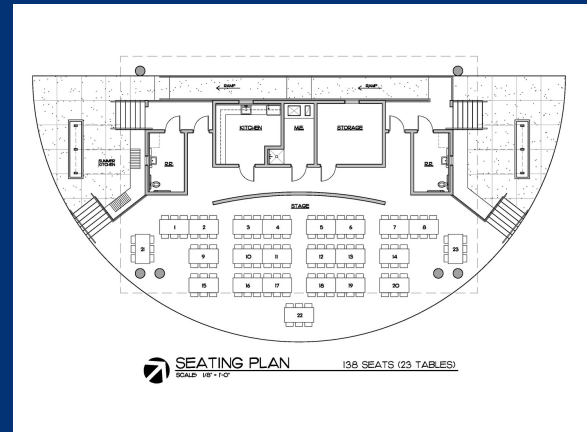
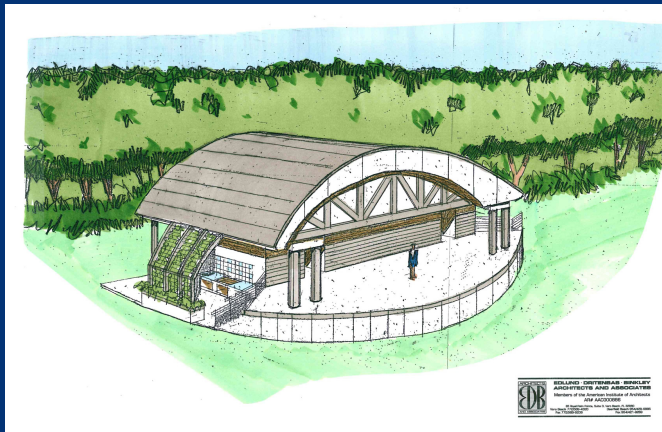
***For more information, please contact Give@DiscoverELC.org
or call (772) 589-5050 ext.113***

Imagining a better future

THOMAS R. SCHIDEL EDUCATION & EVENT PAVILION (COMING SOON!)

The Environmental Learning Center is excited for the future of our campus! Adding to our 64-acre nature center, the Thomas R. Schidel Education & Event Pavilion will provide shade, cooling overhead fans, comfort facilities, hand-washing stations, two family restrooms, a catering area and storage for staff to effectively lead group activities.

The pavilion is the centerpiece of our master plan. The Oval will be a large turf area ringed by native plants, including understory perennials, native canopy and ornamental trees. The Oval can support many types of events, ranging from tented dining to open-air lawn seating for concerts. This space can be used for lectures, concerts, children's programs, weddings, special exhibits and more.



FUN ZONE

Existing



FAMILIES UNPLUG IN NATURE

The FUN Zone aims to reconnect children and their caregivers to nature - to feel more comfortable with taking their own adventures and learning about nearby nature through joy-filled, participatory, and open-ended free play with natural materials inspired by native plants and animals.

Stair-shortcut to and from Canopy Walk, beyond

Shaded sitting area

Themed wall with v

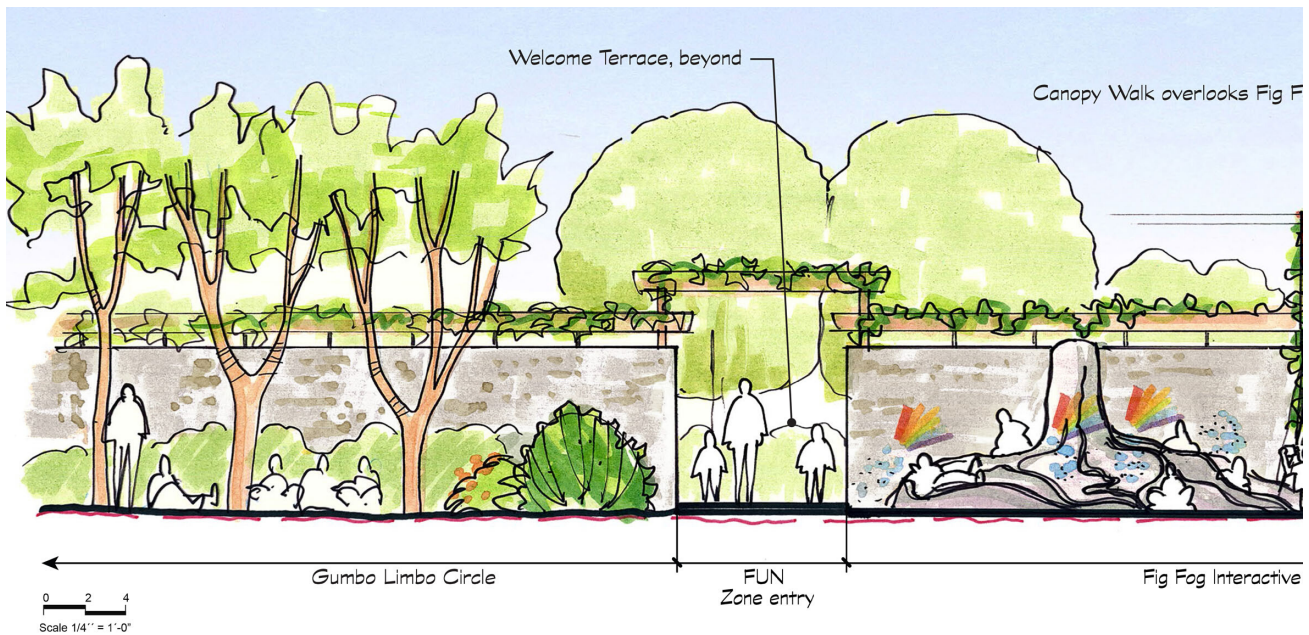
Learn more by emailing Give@DiscoverELC.org or by calling (772) 589-5050 ext. 113

Be a part of the plan.

Environmental Learning Center's FUN Zone

Phase One Goal: \$75,000

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



**FAMILIES
UNPLUG IN
NATURE**

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



Email Give@DiscoverELC.org or call (772) 589-5050 ext. 113 for more information.

Mapping out the Master Plan.



My Pledge



Environmental Learning Center

DiscoverELC.org

(772) 589-5050

My Pledge

COMMITMENT TO GIVE

A donation to the Environmental Learning Center is an investment in environmental education & wellness in our community.

All donations are tax deductible to the extent allowed by the law.

General Donation.

Amount \$ _____

Monthly Pledge. Your signature authorizes the Environmental Learning Center to submit monthly charges for the number of payments specified or until you request us to discontinue your monthly pledge.

Start Date: ____/____/____

Number of Payments: _____

Monthly Amount: \$ _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

Credit Card: ☐ AmEx ☐ VISA ☐ MasterCard ☐ Discover

Card Number: _____

Exp. Date: ____/____/____ CVV: _____ Zip: _____

Name on Card: _____

Signature: _____



Please make all checks payable to the Environmental Learning Center and mail to 255 Live Oak Drive, Vero Beach, FL 32963.

You may also donate online at elc.donorshops.com/Donate