



Photo Credit: Antonia Johnson
Summer Camp Staff & Previous Camper

Smoke Signals

Summer 2016

A Note from the Director

2016 has been another great year for Camp Oty'Okwa. The summer camp program served hundreds of children who deserved lots of attention, learning and fun! But as you know, the summer camp program is not the only thing keeping us busy every year. As you receive this, we continue to offer programming to hundreds more before the year ends. Inside you'll find a recap of the summer, some different perspectives on the program and various opportunities in which you can engage with us year-round.

We are also gearing up for 2017, which marks our 75th anniversary. Reaching such a milestone gives us the opportunity to truly reflect on where we have been, where we are and where we want to go. Camp's mission has always revolved around creating young people who care about themselves, care about other people and care for the environment. The quote from Naturalist Baba Dioum still resonates with us today:

"In the end, we will protect only what we love. We will love only what we understand.
We will understand only what we are taught."

Camp Oty'Okwa is a natural resource with 737 privately owned acres in the Hocking Hills, 687 of which are forever preserved under conservation easements. Camp Oty'Okwa is also a community resource, serving thousands of children each year, many of whom could not have a camp experience otherwise. I want to thank each of you for your support of Camp Oty'Okwa as we strive to continue this tradition in the coming years!

A Note from a Parent

I wanted to write and thank you for all that your organization has done for my son.

We began with Camp Oty'Okwa in 2008, when we received a flier from Franklin County Job and Family Services that they would pay for a summer camp experience. Most of the choices were day camps, and Alexander was already signed up with the OSU Child Care Center for their summer program, so I decided that he might enjoy an overnight camping experience. He was a little young, as he was just six and freshly out of kindergarten, but I decided the worst that could happen was I would get a call from the camp that he was too homesick and I needed to come pick him up. Fortunately, I never got that call. In fact, when he got back, the first thing he wanted to tell me is that he wanted to go again next year, but "for ten days, not just five."

Alexander has gone each summer since kindergarten, along with other camping and sporting events throughout the year. I have watched my son be challenged to speak in front of large groups of people at your fundraising events. He relishes the opportunity to help raise money for Camp Oty'Okwa and Big Brothers Big Sisters, because he sees all the good it does for kids. When he comes home from camp, he is excited to tell me about all the fun things he has done, but also to explain what new friendships he has made.

Sometimes he tells me stories he has heard from kids he went to camp with and the struggles they are currently going through. He wonders how he can be a better friend and what he could tell them to help them get through their situations better.

I am so grateful for Camp Oty'Okwa giving my son the other year-round opportunities to try new things (snowboarding, water skiing) that our family would not have had the ability to provide for him. But more importantly, the staff from your agency, and the camp counselors, have shown leadership, patience and empathy by example. You have developed a relationship with my son that has real depth and substance. He values your mentorship, opinions and although sometimes some constructive criticism has been needed, he has flourished under your guidance and risen to be a better person from the interactions.

I am so profoundly grateful for all that Big Brothers and Big Sisters and Camp Oty'Okwa has done to make my son grow into a great human being. But also, thank you for what you do for all kids. The children you serve get a chance to escape what could be a really crummy home situation and just be a kid for once, enjoy some fresh air and the outdoors in a way that they may never have experienced before, and also get some healthy coping skills and some fun life experiences that may help them bridge the rough times before and after camp. That is priceless.

Most Sincerely,
Kate Curry-Da-Souza



ALEXANDER'S FIRST DAY OF CAMP
AGE 6 2008



ALEXANDER AT STAFF TRAINING AS A
COUNSELOR IN TRAINING
AGE 14 2016

A Note from a Referral Agency

The Hocking Hills is, of course, an ideal setting for a summer camp. So we at Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) of Springfield weren't at all surprised that the first busload of children we took to Camp Oty'Okwa had plenty of stories to share on their way back. But two things that happened on the way over got our attention. One was how awestruck the kids were by the Columbus skyline, which most had never seen. Another came when the bus pulled to a stop and the camp's beautiful and natural surroundings seemed so foreign to the kids that none of them — not a one — wanted, at first, to get off the bus.



For all children, experiences away from home are a chance to see the wider world and imagine new possibilities for their futures. But at Camp Oty'Okwa, where 95 percent of the campers attend with the help of scholarships, BBBS of Central Ohio has tailored a camping experience for those who otherwise would never have one.

Camp Director Dave Schirner, who started as a lifeguard there in 1971, really gets it, as the camp program shows. The counselor-to-camper ratios are rich, typically two counselors for each six to seven campers. The approach is flexible and focused on the needs of the campers, not the camp. So even if there's a slot available, he encourages his staff not to assign a group of six boys with ADHD to an afternoon art session when they could be burning energy and enjoying themselves out on the trails.

Schirner and his staff have four goals for campers:
One: They want campers to feel loved, cared for and valued.

Two: They want them to experience a series of rapid-fire successes in what's an ideal setting for making that happen. Unlike school, where the focus is normally on academics and athletics, camp activities offer a million things to explore and be good at — from swimming and hiking to collecting firewood or doing craft or art projects.

Flowing from the first two is a third goal: To give campers a sense that they have the ability and the power to change the trajectory of their lives; that they themselves can find a new direction in a world that doesn't always point them on the best path.

The camp's final goal is for campers to treat their fellow campers, the campgrounds and nature with respect. Although seemingly simple, these actions are the fundamental building blocks of personal virtue and community values. The camp makes the greatest progress with students who return year after year, also attending various weekend mini-camps throughout the year.

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Those students tend to become Leaders in Training, then Counselors in Training, and finally counselors who extend hands to new campers who may be afraid to get off the bus. Springfield Le'ajaa, who traveled that path, first went to Camp Oty'Okwa to attend Grief Camp (Camp Lionheart), following her mother's passing.

Now a student at Wright State University, her favorite memory from that visit is of the lantern ceremony to honor her mother and all the loved ones of the kids there. She then attended summer and other camps Oty'Okwa offers. Now a young adult, she remembers how her camp experiences provided her with the time away she needed. "It can take your mind off things that are going on at home, like any problems you may have in the city ... 'the real world,'" as campers put it. It's no accident that the words vacating and vacation share the same root.

If a child we think could benefit greatly from camp is afraid to go, our funders don't mind if we send a cousin along for companionship. If we find that four of the five children in a family are headed for camp, they're happy to allow us to send the fifth so a grandmother working full time while caring for them can have a week of peace. And when that week of camp ends, a then more rested grandma gets the added benefit of listening to the children's favorite camp memories.

They are the kind of memories Dave Schirner sees not only as an important legacy of childhood, but as a form of insulation against the hard knocks too many children experience as they search for a path to a brighter future.

Linda Shaffer is president of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Springfield



In Memoriam

Sadly, Virginia Unger passed away July 23, 2016 at the age of 79. Virginia retired after more than 30 years in the kitchen at Camp Oty'Okwa and spent many more years as a neighbor to the Camp. Both Virginia and her husband Bill have been an integral part of Camp Oty'Okwa for decades. Virginia provided meals and comfort for hundreds of campers and staff at Camp as well as opening up her own kitchen on "days off." She was also sure to provide guidance and support over the years as these children grew older and ventured out into the world on their own. Virginia was a horse lover and generations of campers, returning to Camp daily after long hikes, always enjoyed seeing her horses grazing in the pastures near the Camp. We are so grateful to the years of service Virginia dedicated to our Camp and children.

2017 will be 75 years for Camp Oty'Okwa!



Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Ohio has been encouraging camping as a way to interact positively with youth since their beginning in 1933. But in 1942, the agency purchased a piece of land, in what would soon be known as the Hocking Hills, to institute a formal group mentoring program: Camp Oty'Okwa. At that time, there was a belief that working with our children in small, family-oriented groups away from their home environment could produce positive results that could last a lifetime. Seventy-five years later, we still believe in the value of the camp experience and the positive role-modeling that occurs at Camp Oty'Okwa.

A camping experience for children is more than just an opportunity to take a walk in the woods or play a game of kick-ball. Camping is a vehicle for learning and for change; a planned program in a controlled environment from which the children can derive personal, social, emotional, cognitive and physical benefits. At Camp Oty'Okwa each child has the opportunity to have a positive camping experience and get started on their way to becoming a more responsible, mature and loving individual.

Camp Oty'Okwa has grown in many ways over the years, now serving thousands of children throughout the year! Our reach has grown as we continue to partner with numerous social service agencies, environmental organizations and schools throughout the state. Our programming now provides experiential educational opportunities for all ages, allowing us to become a science center for southeastern Ohio. We are a local community resource and a place of respite, learning and fun for communities throughout the state.

Thanks to supporters like you, Camp Oty'Okwa is looking forward to making our next 75 years as impactful and relevant to future generations as the last.

The inaugural Girls Only session was hosted at Camp Oty'Okwa June 18-24, 2016. This effort was made possible by a successful fundraising event, Golf for Girls' Sake, held in September 2015. The week-long camp's foundational components were based on our typical summer camp program. To engage the community, we recruited various female professionals to present workshops to individual cabin groups throughout the week. Presenters spent the morning with the girls explaining their career or discussing leadership topics. Other highlights included several carpentry classes, a talent show with 100% participation (attributed to the lack of boys in attendance!) and an emotional closing ceremony in which the girls were recognized for their accomplishments.

The 2nd annual Golf for Girls' Sake, a female only golf scramble, was held at the Dublin Golf Club on Monday, September 26, 2016. If you are interested in participating as an individual, forming a team or sponsoring this fun event in the coming years, please contact Lori Brown at lbrown@bbbscentralohio.org

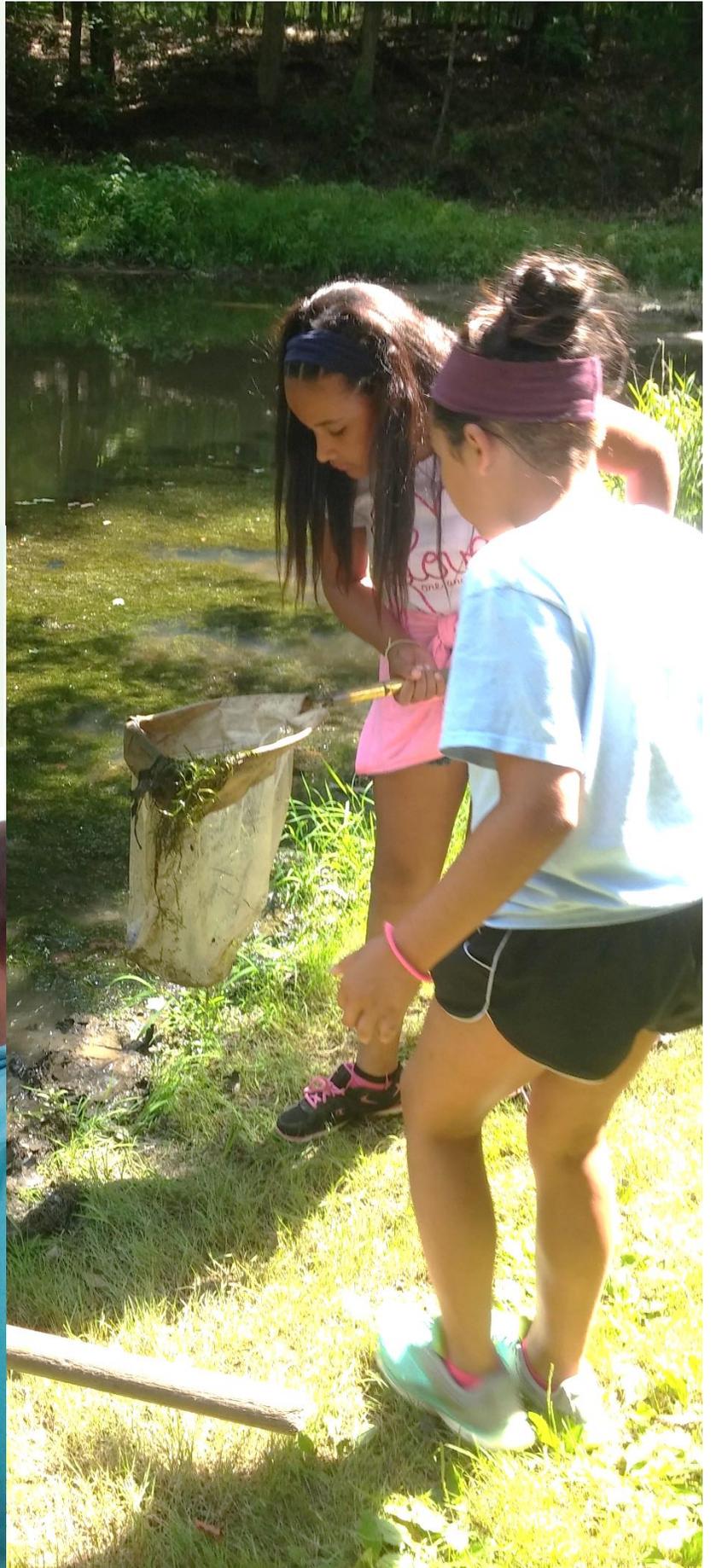
A huge thank you to our amazing presenters, all of whom donated their time and materials to this incredible week:

Barbara Bingham, Caterer
 Jessie Borden, Firefighter
 Sandra Brogden, Publisher
 Heidi Burkett, Organizer
 Dr. Charissa Dyer-Kendler, Pilot & Chemist
 Katie Ferrell, Journalist
 Rachel Gratz, Woodworking Hobbyist
 Mikaela Hunt, Journalist & Media Consultant
 Celeste Malvar-Stewart, Fashion Designer
 Nanette Marie, Playwright & Author
 Elizabeth Martinez, CEO Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Ohio
 Malia Mast, Manager of Technical Design
 Marri Petrucci, Travel Agent
 Jen Reeder, Artist
 Sharyn Rigsbee, Community Outreach & Volunteer Recruitment Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Ohio
 LaTanya Settles, Figure Competitor, Fitness & Finance Consultant
 Chara Williams, Group Fitness Instructor



Science Camp this summer got our campers crawling through stream beds, solving forensic mysteries, making planes and gliders, learning how to eat healthy food straight out of our garden, staring at the stars, singing their hearts out and so much more! We would like to thank the following presenters for sharing their activities with our group:

- Betty Altfater: Forensic Chemistry
- Megan Bihn: Songwriting 101
- Catherine Early and James Nassif: Paleontology
- Mike & Judy Feinstein: Summer Solstice Sky
- Josh Fisher and OSU Career Eagles Aviation: The Forces of Flight
- Heather Fuston and Caitlin Garrity: Compost Exploration
- Charlene Hopkins: Amazing Amphibians
- Makiah Maxson: Eating Fresh
- Levi Miller: Working the Night Shift, Bats of Ohio
- Jen Parsons and the Ohio Valley Museum of Discovery: Messy Science





Literacy Camp began as an initiative in collaboration with Springfield Promise Neighborhood and Lincoln Elementary in Springfield, Ohio. This week was generously sponsored by the Community Health Foundation and the Wilson-Sheehan Foundation, both of Springfield. This summer, thanks to a program grant from the American Camping Association Ohio, every cabin group got to decide on a chapter book to read together. The books, *My Side of the Mountain*, *Julie of the Wolves*, *The Hunger Games*, and *The Island of the Blue Dolphins*, all focus on children's relationships with nature. Campers and counselors connected with the main characters of their books by reading throughout the day on hikes. Each chapter included hands-on activities that related to situations in the book.

For example, if a group decided to read *My Side of the Mountain*, they might come to a section where the main character, Sam Gribbley, has to make a shelter. The group could then make their own shelter in the woods, exploring which methods work best to keep out wind and rain. Or in *The Island of the Blue Dolphins* the main character, Karana, makes herself jewelry and clothing out of natural supplies. The groups reading this book worked with the art director to make their own natural jewelry to take home.

Each book and each chapter had a variety of discussion questions and hands-on activities to get readers of all ages to feel more connected to the stories. The goal of the week was to introduce literary concepts by allowing children to have positive experiences with books. By sharing the trials, joys, and wonders of these characters, our campers became more invested in their books, leading them to want to read more.

Weekend Camps offer year-round engagement and educational opportunities



Throughout 2015-2016, we have been able to offer weekend camp opportunities for **1011** summer campers to return during the school year to Camp Oty'Okwa. Year-round weekend experiences allow summer campers and their families to stay connected to the Camp and staff who know and care for them. More time with the Camp community reinforces the social skills they've learned as we continue to impart the four elements of self-esteem: significance, competence, power and virtue.

It also creates unique opportunities to experience the Camp in various seasons making the environmental education possibilities endless! The pond bustles with life in the spring as the frogs and salamanders emerge. Autumn in the Hocking Hills is visually stunning as the deciduous leaves change. Winter transforms waterfalls to ice and snow-covered hillsides create a quiet landscape full of wonder.

We are so grateful to our partners for valuing this experience. The Ohio Attorney General's office sponsored 671 children who have been identified as victims of crime from around the state. Also many thanks to the Osteopathic Heritage Foundation and the Rocky Community Improvement Fund for providing funding to send youth from Hocking and Athens counties. 100 children from these counties attended from September 2015-May 2016.



Summer of 2016



709 New Friends

Of that 709 youth, 138 Leadership teenagers were involved in this summer, working with younger children and learning more about what it takes to be a positive role model.

287 children were able to have the chance to be a kid at Camp Oty'Okwa thanks to a grant from the Ohio Attorney General's Victims of Crime Assistance. This allowed children from all over the state, from several referral agencies to attend.

Over 90 youth

joined our Appalachian Insect Explorers Club! Kids got the opportunity to see, up close, all sorts of insects and learned the positive role they play in our ecosystems. Thank you to American Electric Power for supporting this program.



1 Luau for Camp Lionheart

54 campers attended a week-long session for youth ages 7-17 who have experienced the death of a parent, sibling, or primary caregiver.

A special thank you to our wonderful kitchen staff who always find ways to make these events fun and memorable for our campers, as demonstrated by their festive fruit bowl!



By The Numbers



4 books were read... over and over again! Cabin groups chose from different options that highlighted young characters interacting with the natural environment. Thanks to the American Camping Association - Ohio, each book came with several copies for each child to read on their own and as a group and fun activities to relate to the stories.

Rural Action's Appalachia Ohio Zero Waste Initiative conducted a Waste Assessment Report of Camp Oty'Okwa with our campers during Science Camp. Campers were deemed official "garbage-ologists" exhibiting a great understanding of best composting and recycling practices. They also reviewed camp's practices concerning waste minimization and reusables.

They also initiated our **1st** year of composting, which supported our very **1st** camp garden. Kids were able to see how the vegetables they ate got to their kitchen table!



Cabin groups competed in a clean up the Hocking Hills litter drive and in addition to picking up bags and bags of trash, **1 ton** of tires were recycled!

Camp Oty'Okwa: Tech-Free since 1942

Rachel Carson, in her book *A Sense of Wonder*, said:

"Play, Incorporating Animistic and Magical Thinking Is Important Because It:
Fosters the healthy, creative and emotional growth of a child;
Forms the best foundation for later intellectual growth.
Provides a way in which children get to know the world and creates possibilities for different ways of responding to it.
Fosters empathy and wonder.

"By suggestion and example, I believe children can be helped to hear the many voices about them. Take time to listen and talk about the voices of the earth and what they mean—the majestic voice of thunder, the winds, the sound of surf or flowing streams."

The average American child, regardless of age, spends a disproportionately large amount of in front of a screen compared to playing outdoors. These days, they don't hear "the majestic voice of thunder" so much as they get enamored by social media. Here at Camp Oty'Okwa, we break that trend.

In 2016, campers as young as 5 and as old as 17 had plenty of opportunities to get outside and learn about the natural world. They did this in one of the best classrooms on earth: our 737-acres of Appalachian forest.

Throughout the summer, we encouraged all of our campers to disconnect from the digital world. Every child who passed through Camp this year had plenty of opportunity for un-guided play in the woods as well as education and engaging activities facilitated by caring counselors and staff. We believe this is important for the physical, social, and emotional development of our campers.

Rachel Carson also said:

"If a child is to keep his inborn sense of wonder, he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement, and mystery of the world we live in."

Here at Camp Oty'Okwa, we keep that sense of wonder alive every day.



The Dempsey Ecology Project, an after-school program from Delaware, Ohio, visited Camp Oty'Okwa twice this summer. These students were some of our oldest campers, and they demonstrated great eco-stewardship by giving back to Camp in several ways.

During their stay, the Dempsey Ecology Project helped Camp conduct an all-taxa biological survey of Camp property. Some of their findings can be found on the citizen science website iNaturalist at: <http://www.inaturalist.org/projects/camp-oty-okwa-flora-and-fauna>. This data helps Camp better understand the amazing resource we have in our biodiversity.

While observing and recording new species of amphibians, ferns, birds, and much more, these students also learned how to use GPS units to survey land and monitor for the invasive species, Hemlock Woolly Adelgid (HWA), which threatens hemlock forests. These surveys will help protect Camp by identifying any threats of HWA.



Youth Climate Action Team

We are excited to announce that in collaboration with partner agency Rural Action, Camp Oty'Okwa recently received a two-year \$91,000 grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to support the Youth Climate Action Team. We will be enlisting high school students from ten southeastern Ohio schools to address issues of climate change and energy management. The students will brainstorm strategies to educate and engage their communities and eventually facilitate sessions on these important topics. Stay tuned for more events as this project progresses in the coming months!

Fall Speaker

Artist Michelle Stitzlein

Sunday, November 13

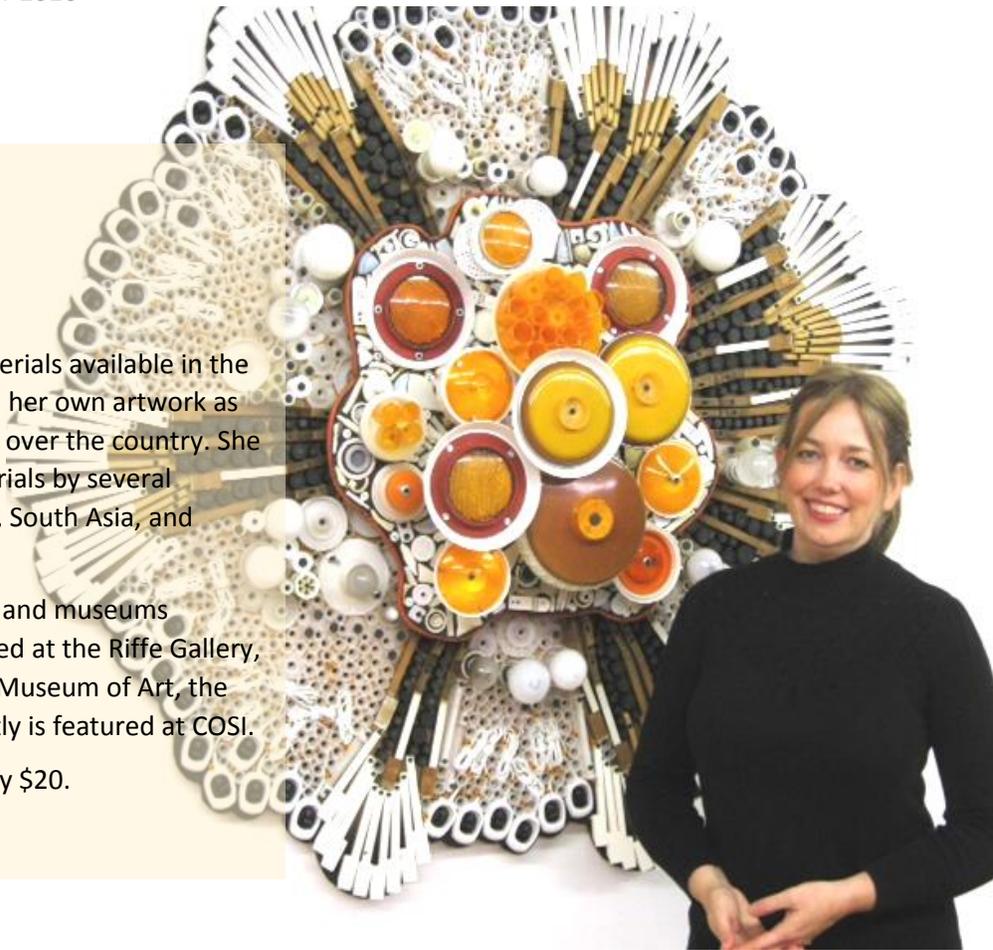
4:30-7:30pm

Michelle will give a presentation about art materials available in the waste stream and how she has utilized them in her own artwork as well as collaborative projects within schools all over the country. She will also show images of art and recycled materials by several inspiring artists viewed on her travels to Africa, South Asia, and Central and South America.

Michelle's work has been exhibited in galleries and museums nationwide. Locally, her work has been exhibited at the Riffe Gallery, the Franklin Park Conservatory, the Columbus Museum of Art, the Grange Insurance Audubon Center and currently is featured at COSI.

Soup, salad bar & dessert provided. Tickets only \$20.

Register at www.campotyokwa.org



 A black and white photograph of a young boy running through a shallow stream, holding a net. In the background, other people are visible in the water and on the banks, surrounded by dense trees. The image is used as a background for a promotional flyer.

Save the Date
November 1st-3rd, 2016
Burr Oak State Park Lodge

**Inquiry-Based
Environmental Education
Conference**

*Reaching academic standards
with environmental education!*

Joe Brehm | joe@ruralaction.org | 740.767.2225

Rural Action

*Camp
Otta'Okwa*

Upcoming Events

Community Workshops

Oct 1, 2016 Community Food Initiatives: Preserving Garden Goodies

Learn easy preservation methods: fermentation, freezing, dehydrating and more to enjoy the taste of summer year-round!

\$5 for CFI members; \$10 for non-members

Oct 8-9, 2016 Survival Skills with Joe Brehm

\$135 registration includes a Mora knife, two lunches, a campfire dinner, and breakfast. Registration is limited!

For both workshops, contact Al Marietta for more information and to RSVP at amarietta@bbbscentralohio.org



Dedication into the Old Growth Forest Network

Sunday, October 16

1:30-3:00 pm

The *Camp Oty'Okwa Old-Growth Forest* at Camp Oty'Okwa will be formally dedicated into the Old-Growth Forest Network as Hocking County's representative in this network of ancient forests. Visitors are invited to join in the dedication celebration, which will take place at the trailhead. Following the dedication there will be a hike into the old growth. Joan Maloof, the Founder and Director of the Old-Growth Forest Network will be there for both the dedication and the hike.

Camp Oty'Okwa Old-Growth Forest is a 200+ acre forest found within the 737 acres of Camp Oty'Okwa. The forest consists of primarily older growth oak/hickory forest and mixed mesophytic forest with a sprinkling of Eastern hemlock. It is a healthy forest with no disturbance for the past 60 years. Once threatened by logging, local naturalist, Paul Knoop was able to coordinate a buy out of the timber company by a local donor to prevent the logging. This action was followed by the creation of a conservation easement to protect in perpetuity the forest from any future efforts to log the forest.

The mission of the Old-Growth Forest Network (OGFN) is to connect people with nature by creating a national network of protected, mature, publically-accessible, native forests. The goal is to preserve at least one forest in every county in the United States that can sustain a forest, estimated to be 2,370 out of a total of 3,140 counties. OGFN's program works to identify forests for the Network, ensure their protection from logging, and inform people of the forest locations. Founded in 2012 by Joan Maloof, PhD in ecology and professor emeritus, the network currently has more than 50 forests in the Network in 15 states. OGFN also recognizes exceptional forest advocates, educates about the extraordinary ecological benefits of old-growth forests, and speaks out regarding immediate threats to specific ancient forests. Learn more at:

www.oldgrowthforest.net

For more information and to RSVP, please contact David Schirner at dschirner@bbbscentralohio.org or 614.795.2850

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Take a Peek...



Summer 2016 in Review

Camp Oty'Okwa turns 75!

**Environmental stewardship
and remaining a safe haven
for kids throughout the state**