

THE AMAZING NEWS PAPER

May 1, 2008 -
Issue 4



Foundation Board Members: Leah Bennett - Craig Bennett - Jim Bartel - Dick Rief - Bud Bennett - Ryan Spencer - Rob Fisher - Beth Ardisana

If this is your first issue of The Amazing Newspaper, this was created to help spread the mission of the Spirit of Alexandria Foundation, founded in January of 2006. The Spirit of Alexandria Foundation was created to carry on the legacy of Alexandria Bennett, a little girl whose passion for nature and generosity was evident to everyone around her. Through this foundation it is her family and friends mission to help children experience nature and all its wonderment. The Spirit of Alexandria Foundation will work in cooperation with partners in the places close to home and across the country in order to achieve our mission.

In 2003, Alexandria (6 at the time), decided she wanted to write a newspaper. Her first report was on our neighbors swing set that a tree fell on. Also in the same issue was a report on "weeds". Alexandria took her own pictures and wrote her own stories. Her newspaper ran for one year, an issue a month.

The Amazing Newspaper will become a source for contributors, big and small, to learn about the Foundation's latest accomplishments and our future plans. Though she is missed more than words can express, her legacy will continue as long as there are people like you who believe in our Foundation.

The 2nd Annual Spirit of Alexandria Open will be on July 7th, 2008

at the Wyndgate in Rochester Hills.

If you would like to register please email Leah Bennett at:
leah.bennett@spiritofalexandria.org for a form.



Photo by Britt Smart



Photo by Britt Smart

Winter Visit to Jackson Hole

In late January, Leah and I visited the Teton Science Schools so that we could discuss the future plans for the Mobile Nature Classrooms. At the right, you can see the Red Bus ready and waiting for its next program. We were lucky enough to arrive in Jackson Hole on their coldest day and witness their worst blow down conditions. All the passes were closed out of Jackson with 80 mile an hour gusts and plenty of snow. It was very cool. In between the periods of blowing snow we did catch sight of 48+ Big Horn Sheep on the bluffs at the Elk Refuge. The most that had been sighted recently.

We learned a lot during our meetings and flew away feeling successful with our trip. Leah and I were introduced to the board members of Teton Science Schools where everyone shared their appreciation for the Mobile Nature Classroom.

It was eye opening to hear about the lack of transportation and why the use of the Red Bus is so generous to the Jackson Hole area. One group that has used the Mobile Classroom is a group of Latino families. Most families do not have the funds to experience the National Parks and a great majority do not have a vehicle for such a trip. This is what our mission is all about. In early April, Benj Sinclair, naturalist and instructor at TSS, drove the Latino families throughout the Grand Teton area for a day of exploration and education about the area where they live.

The Red Bus will be traveling to Fort Hall, Idaho in June, driven by a TSS Naturalist, to pick up members of the Shoshone-Bannock Tribe. The Mobile Classroom will then travel through Yellowstone National Park to the northeast entrance, and on to Silver Gate, Montana where they will stay for the week. The Cross Cultural Exchange Residential Camp with the support of the Spirit of Alexandria Foundation is key to helping tribes teach the youngest generations about their heritage.

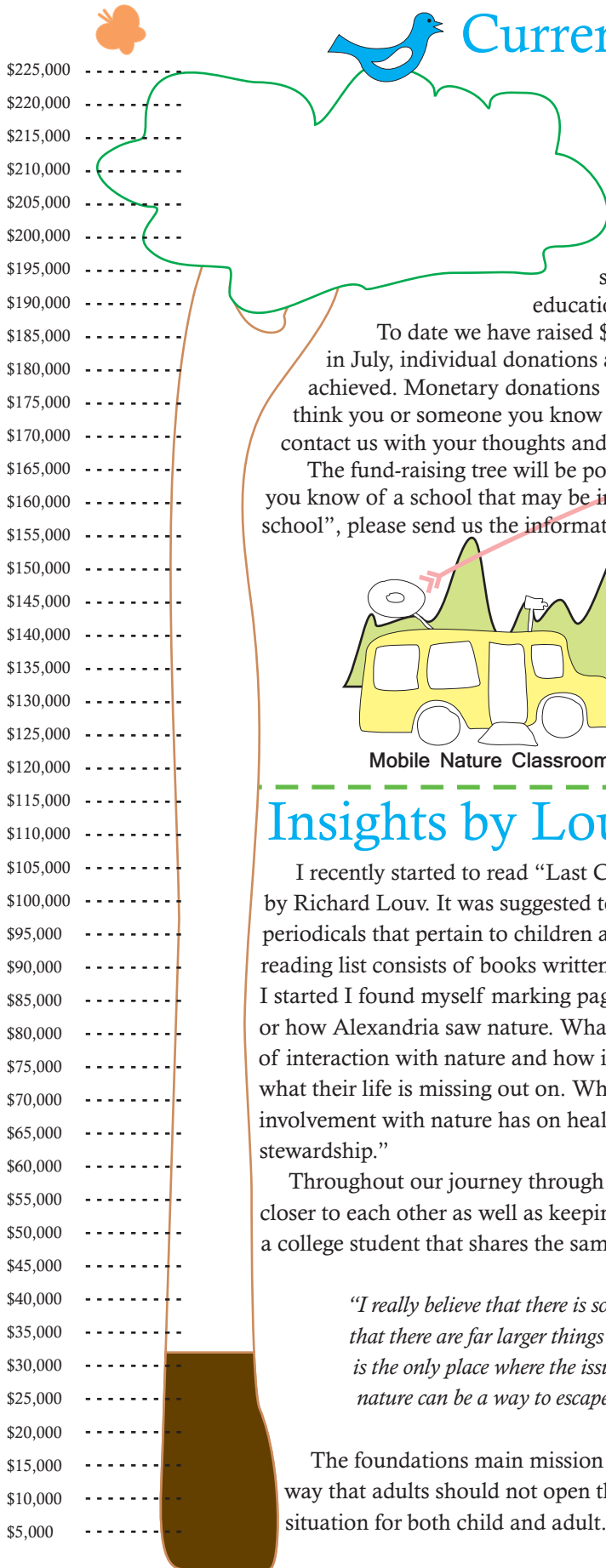
In the hopes of promoting interest in the foundation to the National Parks system, the foundation will be meeting with the Super intendant of the Grand Teton National Park in late August. During the same visit representatives of the foundation will speak to members of the Association of Nature Centers about our mission to connect children to nature. For such a little girl, Alexandria's spirit is huge and we hope to share it with everyone we meet.



Mobile Classroom at Journey School Campus in Jackson, WY/Leah Bennett

Visit us at: www.spiritofalexandria.org • Write us at: 47451 Avante Dr. • Wixom, Michigan 48393

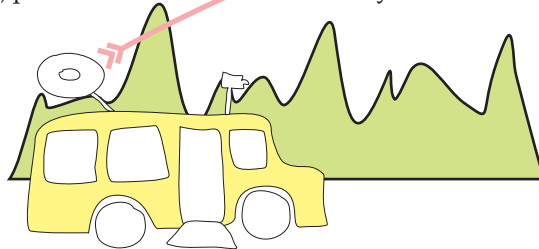
Current Fundraising Goal



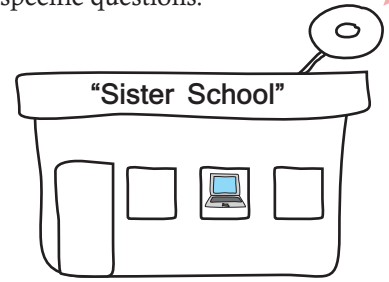
The Spirit of Alexandria Foundation has its sights high for 2008 with the goal of building a 2nd Mobile Nature Classroom with all the technology to connect via satellite to participating schools. In order to complete the second bus \$225,000 needs to be raised. At the left we have depicted our version of a fund-raising thermometer, in our case a tree. The amount to be raised covers the purchase of an ARBOC Mobility low floor bus, removable seats with seat belts, rolling carts for storage and displays, on-board computer network and satellite system, educational tools (shared laptops and digital cameras), and external camera.

To date we have raised \$31,000 towards this particular project. Through our Annual Golf Outing in July, individual donations and our new fundraiser in December, we hope that our goal can be achieved. Monetary donations are greatly appreciated, but that is not the only way you can help. If you think you or someone you know can help us with educational supplies, nature items, or electronics please contact us with your thoughts and questions.

The fund-raising tree will be posted on the website; please check back regularly to see our progress. If you know of a school that may be interested in participating with our Mobile Nature Classroom as a "sister school", please send us the information by email or call if you have specific questions.



Mobile Nature Classroom



Insights by Louv Story by Leah Bennett

I recently started to read "Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder" by Richard Louv. It was suggested to me by the staff at Teton Science Schools and is mentioned in periodicals that pertain to children and the environment. I was hesitant to start the book because my usual reading list consists of books written by Catherine Coulter or James Patterson (mysteries and thrillers). Once I started I found myself marking pages with remarks that either related to how Craig and I looked at nature or how Alexandria saw nature. What struck me the most was how Richard Louv puts in perspective the lack of interaction with nature and how it translates to what people are like today, how they see the world and what their life is missing out on. What Richard writes helps the reader to recognize "the positive effects of involvement with nature has on health, concentration, creative play, and a developing bond for environmental stewardship."

Throughout our journey through healing, Craig and I have found that enjoying nature has brought us closer to each other as well as keeping us close to Alexandria's spirit. In Louv's book there is a paragraph by a college student that shares the same sentiment:

"I really believe that there is something about nature – that when you are in it, it makes you realize that there are far larger things at work than yourself. This helps to put problems in perspective. And it is the only place where the issues facing me do not need immediate attention or resolution. Being in nature can be a way to escape without fully leaving the world."

The foundations main mission may be to connect children to nature, this does not mean that along the way that adults should not open their eyes to what is right outside their front door. Nature is a win-win situation for both child and adult.

Butterfly Chairs

These butterflies won't be flying anywhere soon. The 1/4 inch steel they are made from make them sturdy; you won't find this chair tipped over in your garden.

Leah drew the butterfly design and Rob Byrd created the CAD data; from this the 2 pieces for each chair were laser cut out of steel. The butterfly was drawn with an A incorporated into the body of the butterfly. The A is also cut out of the seat. Craig took the flat piece bending the wings at the body and rolled the tail and wings, creating dimension. The seat was then welded into place and a structure under the seat was added to ensure the strength of the chair.



In the 2 pictures above at left, this chair has a CS as part of the design standing for Charyl Stockwell. It is painted like a butterfly Charyl had drawn. This chair was given to Chuck and Shelley in memory of Alexandria and their daughter Charyl. It now sits in the gallery at Alexandria's school. The monarch chair shown above right, resides in the garden that the foundation is working on at CSA. Initially, 4 chairs were cut, allowing for Leah and Craig to see what interest there was in the purchase of a chair. The second monarch chair was donated personally from Leah and Craig to CSA for their annual Beluga Ball where it raised \$650.

The foundation is in the process of working with Dexter, located in Indiana, to have 13 full size chairs and ten 1/4 scale chairs cut. The silent auction at the foundation's 2nd Annual Golf Outing will have full size and 1/4 scale chairs as some of the items up for auction. We plan on painting all the chairs like monarchs. If you think you are interested in a chair, please call for prices. All proceeds will go to the foundation.

Students Tell Their Tale

The four students that visited The Grand Tetons and Yellowstone on scholarship in 2007 enthusiastically spoke to the entire middle school at Charyl Stockwell Academy about their individual experiences out west. Michael Swain, CSA Science Teacher, and Leah both spoke to the student body. Leah explained that starting this year we were only going to provide 3 scholarships. The reason for this was because the foundation board members want to offer the same opportunity to children outside the state of Michigan. The foundation will also be providing a scholarship to a teacher to attend a summer program at the Teacher Learning Center at the Teton Science Schools.

The four students each took a turn to express to the crowd what they liked best and what they got out of the 10 day ecology program. The common advice between the four youngsters was that if you don't like bugs, do not want to be near wild animals and can't live without electronics, no need to apply. You have to love the honesty of the young. They also shared stories of bird banding, hiking, and the friends they made and continue to keep in touch with.

On April 23rd, Craig and Leah along with the decision board at CSA chose the three students best qualified. The CSA students

who will be attending the Middle School Field Ecology Program are Katie Harbaugh, Jessica Idowu and Clare Kstesich. Congratulations!

The foundation will also be sending Kyle McGaugh, a student from Tongue River Middle School in Ranchester, WY, to the Ecology program at TSS. This student was chosen through the list of students Teton Science Schools has of children who cannot afford to attend one of their programs. Judy Herman, Registrar at TSS, expressed interest in this young man, who she believes is a very deserving kid who's had a rough life and would fit with our foundation's mission.

Board members have started to contact teachers at schools outside of Michigan based upon recommendations from staff at TSS, so that we can start to create a database of teachers who can help to connect us with deserving children. These connections will also help us in setting up our sister schools we will need to utilize our Mobile Nature Classrooms.

If you know of a teacher that may be interested in what our foundation is doing please send us their names.



Students awarded 2007 scholarships:
Kailey Skolnik, James Kstesich, Anna Buzolits & Tessa O'Doherty



Students awarded 2008 scholarships: Katie Harbaugh, Clare Kstesich & Jessica Idowu

Characters in our Yard Story by Leah Bennett

When Craig and I moved into our rental house a year ago, we couldn't wait to put up a bird feeder. The first month our first feeder was up, we were disappointed in the lack of visitors. That has changed. We have battled the squirrels chewing up the feeders hanging in the trees; baffles are a wonderful invention. Watching a squirrel climb up the Shepard pole to only slide back down is also entertaining for us and our three cats (all indoor). As you can see in the bottom picture, we didn't have a baffle on this pole; this squirrel is pretty crafty. I finally shoed him off once I got all the pictures I needed.



It wasn't long until Craig invested in a platform feeder, in hopes of getting the bigger birds to visit. We did have a Crow test the bird seed on the platform - they are bigger than the average bird we had been attracting. There are a variety of birds that have come to rely on us for food such as: Cardinals (5 couples), Juncos (winter only), Chipping Sparrows, Gold Finches, Red Breasted Nuthatch, White Breasted Nuthatch, Titmouse, Indigo Bunting, Grosbeak, Red-winged Blackbird, Common Grackle, Mourning Dove (a lot of them), Red-headed Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Brown-headed Cowbird and Craig's favorite the Chickadee. We have also have the occasional Sharp-shinned Hawk fly through the yard looking for lunch.

The last of the characters that visit us, are the deer. I never realized that our bird feeders would also feed the deers. I wouldn't want to eat out of the feeder after that deer had licked all over. When they aren't using the feeder shown at right, they are chewing holes in the finch socks. Needless to say, we no longer use finch socks.

The squirrels are very persistent in Leah and Craig's yard / Leah Bennett



What characters do you have in your yard?

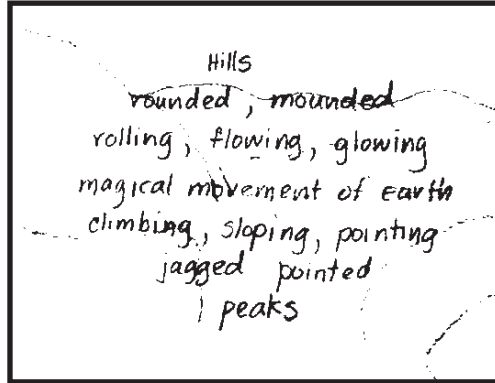


Chickadee using Leah's car as a perch - that is the best guess at this point / Leah Bennett

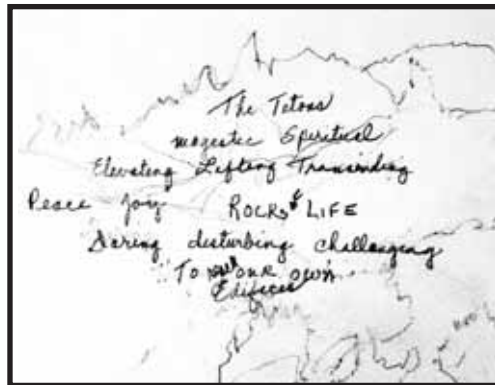
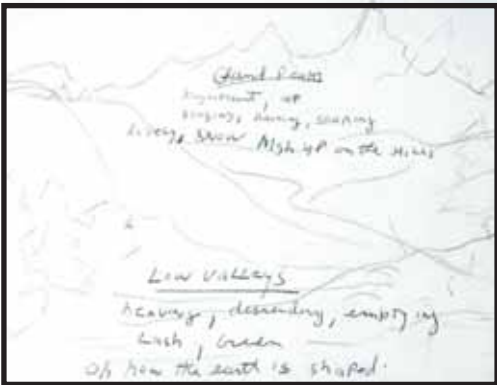


The bird feeders aren't only for the birds / Leah Bennett

Diamante Poems Created by Participants of "Connecting to Nature through the Arts & Sciences"



Elderhostel (nonprofit organization offering older adults short-term, low-cost courses, housing, and meals, usually on college campuses) - August 2007 / Photo by Rollin Weber



Tufted Titmouse photographed at Kensington Metro park / Leah Bennett



SNAIL LOVE by Alexandria Bennett - 2005



Paintings of Jackson Campus in the Style of Eric Carle



Cosette Kortum - 4th Grade, Journey School



Annika Jorgensen - 4th Grade, Journey School



Quinn King - 3rd Grade, Journey School

Calling all Naturalists. Do you have a photo, a poem, story or a drawing relating to nature - we would like to include it in a future issue of The Amazing Newspaper. Whether you are 5 or 75, we want you to share the wonders around you with us and everyone who will read The Amazing Newspaper. Submit your nature experiences to the address below.

Thank you to everyone who has submitted artwork, stories or photos for this issue.