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.

Foundation Board Members: Leah Bennett - Craig Bennett - Jim Bartel - Bud Bennett - Ryan Spencer - Rob Fisher - Britt Smart - Dick Grant

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Visit us at: www.spiritofalexandria.org • Write us at: 4330 Heatherwood Dr., Milford, Michigan 48381
15 years ago, on May 4th, Alexandria published her first issue (stories at right) of the Amazing Newspaper. She photographed and wrote about what was in her “natural environment”. Although the original version only lasted for 11 issues, what she started lives on today sharing programs created in her name and suggesting ways a person can experience their “natural environment”.

Going outside to help Alexandria with her newspaper seemed natural, where else would you find cool things like a GIANT weed or a tree laying on your neighbors swing set. The outdoors was her PLAYROOM, where her play mates were birds, butterflies, frogs, worms, etc. Her toys were the rocks, fossils, leaves and so much more. Sure she spent time watching videos or playing computer games, the majority revolved around something in the natural world. This is something today’s children are lacking, it’s a known fact that kids gravitate towards electronics more than NATURE.

Nature, the Natural World is not just for children. Nature is for everyone - it really is the best medicine.

Research has been done that show NATURE is healthy, and is starting to be prescribed. In 2013, pediatrician Robert Zarr, launched “Park Rx”. He prescribed TIME OUTSIDE. Hundreds of studies have documented the effect of green space, “ECOTHERAPY” or “GREEN THERAPY and “EARTH-CENTERED THERAPY”, can help treat a variety of medical conditions such as post-cancer fatigue, high blood pressure to diabetes. In 2007, researchers at the University of Essex in the UK, found that as little as 5 minutes in a natural setting - walking in a park or gardening, improves mood, self-esteem and motivation. NATURE may not be the cure all, magic pill, but there really is no down side to being in NATURE.

When someone is sick, they so easily take medicine, OTC or prescribed. Natural or organic is the in thing, whether it is vitamins, food or clothing. “NATURE” should become one of the things that is added to all our lists.

Below is a report found on www.treeday.planetark.org.

“Adding Trees - A Prescription for Health, Happiness and Fulfilment

New research by Planet Ark and sponsored by Toyota, released in the lead up to National Tree Day 2016, examines how time in nature enhances and grows the key areas in life that Australians consider the most important for a fulfilling life – health, happiness, learning, relaxation and relationships.

The report titled Adding Trees - A Prescription for Health, Happiness and Fulfilment, found:

1. Just 10 minutes’ relaxing outside is enough to significantly reduce blood pressure.
2. Time in nature reduces a person’s chance of developing a range of diseases, including diabetes by 43%, cardiovascular disease and stroke by 37% and depression by 25%.
3. Nature induces positive feelings through a number of physiological mechanisms, including activating the brain’s dopamine reward system.
4. Students who take part in outdoor learning programs perform better in reading, writing, maths and science, with 77% of teachers reporting student improvement in standardized tests.
5. A strong connection to nature makes people more likely to feel passionate about relationships with their friends and family.

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Nature Camps Expanded, become a Junior Naturalist.

Story by Leah Bennett

26 students has grown to 885 in seven years. A camp that originally was only for children entering 3rd - 5th grades grew to an alumni camp for those that still had an interest in nature. Now the 4th, 5th & 6th grader Nature Campers who have graduated from the Alumni camp or for the students who have a keen interest in NATURE have another option. “Nature Nuts” will love this camp! Get hands-on experiences alongside Howell Nature Center’s most experienced naturalists. The Naturalist in Training program is for students entering the 7th & 8th grades; combines the wonders of wildlife education and zoology with the fascinating aspects of ecology, all while learning the concepts of conservation. Upon completion, campers are awarded with a Spirit of Alexandria Junior Naturalist Certificate. They will also be invited to serve as Junior Naturalists at the Howell Nature Center’s annual community nature events.

Alexandria achieved both her summer and winter Junior Ranger badges and certificate at Yellowstone National Park, both of which she had great pride in and enjoyed sharing with her classmates. Her journey as a Naturalist was in part due to her involvement in such programs. The foundation looks forward to meeting all the Junior Naturalists.

Scholarships are available for all 3 camps - go to www.howellnaturecenter.org to learn more about these special NATURE Camps. First come basis.

Above left - Alexandria traveling through Yellowstone aboard the Yellow Bus, Above right - Alexandria sharing her excursion with her class.

Birds of Prey and now Creatures of the Night & Michigan Mammals

Story by Beth Baumgartner/HNC

“You have such a cool job!” is something I frequently hear when someone asks me what I do. And even on the coldest, wettest day; I have to agree, because it’s not every day at work for most people that brings you face-to-face with owls, falcons, and eagles. I really have a fantastic opportunity in my career as Wildlife Education Coordinator at the Howell Nature Center. Not just do I work at a facility that rehabilitates wildlife, and provides loving forever homes to some of Michigan’s most amazing creatures that need permanent assistance, but I also get the opportunity to connect and inspire. I was that wild nature child when I was younger, and I feel like my life has made a pretty wonderful full circle by getting the chance to lead the next generations of nature-loving kids to the wild, myself. When I can help a child see an insect as a complex creature more than worthy of our compassion, when I can engage children of all sensory learning types in the amazing adaptations of Michigan wildlife, or when I hear gasps of awe for our eagle, Kili, laughter at the antics of an opossum, and the spark of passion in the eyes of a future veterinarian; I know my day at work is filled with something more important than a paycheck, it’s filled with purpose and passion. Even more special is the opportunity to expand this inspiration to conserve to many communities and children that may not otherwise have the privilege or opportunity to experience nature on such an intimate level. As an avid young naturalist who came from very humble beginnings, I know how important and special such programs are. The thank you letters I see from these programs, like the Spirit of Alexandria Nature Bus and Nature Camps, are treasured moments trapped on paper. I see in these letters a reflection of my younger self, and, more importantly, the future conservationists and naturalists for generations to come. Thank you to all for your support and passion. From the children our programming reaches, to the nature they learn to love and protect – thank you, from the bottom of our hearts.
Excursion to Michigan.

Story by Leah Bennett

January of this year, John Carlson began as the new CEO at Howell Nature Center (HNC). After 40 years Dick Grant retired leaving a legacy of footprints to follow in. After nine years, would the new CEO believe in the foundation’s mission, let alone continue the partnership.

All worries have been set aside after meeting with John Carlson, CEO. During the last 3 months Craig and I have met and spoke with John quite a bit. We have begun to share “smiles”. As John learns about Alexandria, through the stories and photos we have shared, he refers to them as “smiles”. John recently shared a “smile” with us, the letter at the right, applying for the excursion trip scholarship.

Everyone who has donated, supported or volunteered for the foundation should feel a sense of pride after reading this young girl’s letter. Thank you to all.

Go to http://howellnaturecenter.org/camps/summer-day-camp/ for more information.

Photo from 2017 Excursion Trip to Picture Rocks.

Hello my name is Liam Guild and I am twelve years old. I have been coming to stay over camps at Howell Nature Center for 5 years and have been coming to Michigan all my life. I am from Chicago, Illinois and look forward to coming back to Howell Nature Center every summer.

I have been fortunate to enjoy dunes in Michigan, but based on the pictures I have seen and the research I have done, the dunes at Sleeping Bear are beyond comparison.

So why do I ask to be considered to participate in this camp? Speaking from my heart I can say I feel an honest connection to the camp and a strong connection to what the spirit of Alexandria is. After last year’s spirit of Alexandria Alumni camp and going to the park and tree house that was built, I did some research. I learned that Alexandria was a curious young girl with a deep interest in animals and nature. Her story is so heart touching, and I would love another opportunity to live it through.

In conclusion, I have been able to participate in the Spirit of Alexandria Camp for the past 3 years knowing I earned it each year by being kind and respectful and I would consider it an honor and a privilege to continue to live Alexandria’s legacy through the Excursion Camp.

Thank you for the good that the spirit of Alexandria does and thank you in advance for your consideration.
Camp Wonder. Story by Emma Makdessi/HNC

Camp changes lives, that’s a fact. It’s a place for kids to discover who they are and the kind of person they want to become. It allows them to leave the noise of the city and become immersed in the beauty of the wilderness. By partnering with the Spirit of Alexandria Foundation, Camp Wonder at the Howell Nature Center is able to provide a unique summer camp experience.

Excursion Camps combine all of the best components of traditional camp and places them in a non-traditional setting that allows teens to connect with nature through outdoor adventures and experiences.

This past summer, over 20 lives were impacted by the support of the Spirit of Alexandria Foundation through the Excursion program alone. From kayaking to Turnip Rock to biking Mackinac Island; hiking through Pictured Rocks (photos shown from 2017 trip) and exploring Tahquamenon Falls, these campers created memories that will last a lifetime.

We are looking forward to impacting even more lives this summer. The adventures are bigger and the experiences are richer. We know that with our powers combined, Spirit of Alexandria and Camp Wonder can continue to inspire a sense of connection to the world around us and a deeper love and appreciation for nature and the outdoors.

Starting this year, there will be 2 Excursion Camps. Campers entering 7th-9th grades will take part in the Spirit of Alexandria Dune Discovery in mid-July. During the first week of August students entering 10th-12th grades will take part in the Spirit of Alexandria Pictured Rocks Kayaking and Backpacking trip. Both will be an exciting opportunity to challenge the students and allow them to learn new skills in a wilderness setting.