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Parent[®]

Climb It, Dig It, Plant It at the Library

By Tracy Delgado-LaStella

Where can children climb, dig, plant, create and splash while reading? At the Middle Country Public Library in Centereach where starting in July they can discover the Nature Explorium, an interactive outdoor learning environment. Working with the Dimensions Educational Research Foundation, the Long Island Nature Collaborative for Kids (LINCK) and the Middle Country Coalition for Smart Growth, the library aims to integrate their services with nature literacy and environmental education for youth.

The Nature Explorium contains a variety of learning areas, all geared toward connecting children to a different aspect of nature. Dedicated to exploration and discovery, the Nature Explorium provides children with the opportunity to learn and reinforce valuable life experiences, including the development of observation skills, visual-spatial skills and social skills. Through hands-on outdoor learning activities, children and their families become engaged in nature, and are introduced to the importance of individual and community responsibility for the environment. Studies show when children have regular contact with nature, they learn and grow better. The Explorium includes areas for climbing/crawling,



nature

explorium

...Discover It!

messy materials, building, nature art, music and performance, planting, gathering/conversation place, reading and a water feature. A welcoming "entry" was designed to transition from the library into the Nature Explorium with a book path lined with donors' favorite children's book titles and quotes. The play areas are called Climb It, Dig It, Plant It, Read It, Create It, Play It and Splash It.

The Nature Explorium connects children and their families to the environment and outdoor learning. By

providing this outdoor area for the community, the Library offers a unique way to connect literacy, learning and an appreciation for nature as a regular part of the library visit.

The Nature Explorium is open to all visitors. The hours are 10 AM to 7 PM through September. It will be opening at the end of June. Find more information at www.natureexplorium.org or by calling 631-585-9393, Ext. 107.

Tracy Delgado-LaStella is coordinator of youth services at Middle Country Public Library.

The Movement to Reconnect Children With Nature

"Children will not save what they don't love." This is what environmentalists throughout the world have claimed as the rationale for an international movement to reconnect children with nature. Baby boomers had free-range childhoods where we spent most of our days outdoors in activities of our own making. We learned how to explore, imagine, resolve issues, take turns, cooperate — all without parental intervention. We decided what and where to play from a radius of four miles from our homes. Children today are allowed to play within a one-block radius and spend most of their days inside in front of a screen. These realities are what gave life to the Long Island Nature Collaborative for Kids (LINCK). In addition to public education and training of adults, LINCK is creating nature explore classrooms, or all-natural play spaces, in parks, schools, child care programs and libraries, particularly in high-needs communities where safe, outdoor play spaces are limited. The Nature Explorium is one of the more creative outdoor classrooms that LINCK has inspired.

— Dana E. Friedman, Ed.D., president of the Early Years Institute