



**Date:** July 1, 2009

## **ORGANIZATIONS UNITE TO FORM REGIONAL CHILDREN AND NATURE COALITION**

(ST. LOUIS): One year ago, a group of educators, horticulturists, scientists and concerned citizens from several St. Louis-area attractions, universities and institutions attended a community forum on “Connecting Children with Nature,” presented by the Arbor Day Foundation and Dimensions Educational Research Foundation. Each of the organizations was already independently tackling the challenge of “nature deficit disorder” (a term coined by Richard Louv in his book, “Last Child in the Woods”) by reconnecting children in the greater St. Louis-area with their natural surroundings. However, the seed of a new idea was planted at this meeting: collaborating to achieve common educational goals. Thus, the Gateway Children’s Nature Connection (Gateway CNC) was formed.

Gateway CNC’s Charter Member organizations include the Missouri Botanical Garden’s Doris I. Schnuck Children’s Garden, Litzsinger Road Ecology Center and Shaw Nature Reserve; Saint Louis Zoo; Missouri Department of Natural Resources—Division of State Parks – Dr. Edmund A. Babler Memorial State Park; Missouri Department of Conservation; Southern Illinois University Edwardsville – School of Education; and the Raintree Learning Community.

**(over)**

## **ADD ONE: Gateway CNC**

The new coalition's mission is to bring together environmental conservationists, early childhood and elementary school educators, outdoor (nature) educators, health professionals, horticulturists, professional architects and engineers, business leaders, government agencies, politicians, media and parents to promote and/or create meaningful and consistent opportunities to reconnect an entire generation of children with nature and the environment.

“There is such an incredible wealth of nature-based resources in the greater St. Louis area that it felt only natural to collaborate on projects and promote programs, events and other opportunities that support our common goal of connecting children and nature,” said Lydia Toth, senior manager, education at the Shaw Nature Reserve. “Through the Gateway CNC, we can create a single site where families, teachers and youth program leaders can learn about all the wonderful nature program opportunities available in the region. We can also work together to develop ever more creative activities, which will benefit from the synergy of this wonderful and diverse group of organizations and individuals.”

Short- and long-term goals of the coalition include becoming the clearing house for ideas, activities, events and information related to children's nature education in the metro-St. Louis area. Collaborators will perform outreach to schools, children's advocacy groups, organizations and parents regarding the value of nature education. The group plans to serve as a communications conduit by which the numerous entities involved can spread the word about children's nature education, providing a consistent resource for media, government officials and the general public. The coalition also plans to host period activities, events and discussion forums for sharing approaches for moving children's nature education forward in the region.

Since last year, the Gateway CNC Charter Members have been meeting every six weeks to work on the many tasks involved in forming a new organization. In July 2009, the group will launch a coalition Web site, [www.gatewaycnc.org](http://www.gatewaycnc.org), to share information with the community including resources, upcoming events, charter member profiles, photos and “Kids Korner” nature-themed activities, and to hopefully attract new members.

For more information on the Gateway CNC, visit [www.gatewaycnc.org](http://www.gatewaycnc.org) or e-mail [info@gatewaycnc.org](mailto:info@gatewaycnc.org).

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