

Great Plains Nature Center

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News Release

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Flint Hills Resources and GreenWay Alliance step forward to fund teaching position at Great Plains Nature Center

Grants will ensure that Naturalist Joyce Lent, a 32-year employee of USD 259, will continue to teach children at the nature center for at least the rest of the current academic year

Wichita - Seeking to ensure that students will be able to continue to benefit from experiencing nature outside the classroom, the Great Plains Nature Center announced today it had secured funding to ensure that one of the two Teaching Specialist positions which had to be eliminated as the result of USD 259 budget challenges will continue through the current academic year as the result of grants from two donors.

Joyce Lent has been hired by the Friends of the Great Plains Nature Center, a non-profit organization which supports the nature and environmental educational initiatives conducted by the nature center. Lent had been employed by USD 259 for 32 years, but will continue teaching students at the Great Plains Nature Center during field trips and programs, just as she has been doing for the past 6 years.

“To have students be able to actually see the real thing gives them a different experience than a book or a video,” said Lent. “This is a personal experience for kids.”

Having district teachers at the nature center allowed them to design field trips to meet curriculum standards and build on what is taught in class. Lent stated that she attempts to change the typical “Eww, nasty!” reaction of urban children to “Oh, cool!” when they encounter a snake, spider or even a turkey vulture.

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"I am pleased that Koch's Flint Hills Resources and the GreenWay Alliance have stepped forward to fund this important position," said Winston Brooks, Wichita Public Schools Superintendent. "It is unfortunate that the legislature did not fund public schools to a level adequate enough that the Wichita Public Schools could continue to support this program. We are glad to see donors make a commitment to temporarily fund the naturalist so that students from throughout the Wichita area may continue to benefit from the experiential learning offered at the Great Plains Nature Center."

The Great Plains Nature Center, which is located adjacent to the 240-acre Chisholm Creek Park at the northwest corner of 29th & Woodlawn attracted more than 150,000 visitors last year. The staff conducted over 1,500 programs for more than 50,000 students, scouts, environmental groups, clubs, and individual visitors.

"We are thankful to be in a position where we can assist the Great Plains Nature Center and USD 259 and help rescue these valuable education programs this year," said Marla Howard, President of the GreenWay Alliance, an organization which is a local non-profit organization that, through partnerships with public and private organizations, helps enhance recreational and educational opportunities.

The two teaching positions had been handling approximately 580 groups a year, the vast majority of which are from Wichita Public Schools. The retention of Lent in her role as a naturalist will help ensure that at least half of the requests for field trips can be accommodated.

"It is critically important that young people have the opportunity for science-based environmental and nature education experiences, so we are most appreciative of the support from Koch's Flint Hills Resources and the GreenWay Alliance as we strive to teach our youth about nature and the environment," said Lorrie Beck, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's representative at the Great Plains Nature Center.

Great Plains Nature Center, located in northeast Wichita, hosted more than 150,000 visitors during the past 12 months. The center is a cooperative partnership between the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, and the City of Wichita Department of Park and Recreation. The facility features the Koch Habitat Hall, the Coleman Auditorium, a wildlife observatory, the Owl's Nest Gift Shop, a classroom, and offices. The center offers a variety of nature education programs and hosts meetings for a variety of local wildlife, outdoors and environmental groups. More information about the Great Plains Nature Center can be found at www.gpnc.org

GreenWay Alliance is a non-profit organization whose sole purpose is to support and promote community parks, greenways, recreation and open spaces. Their goals are to create and advocate for conservation and preservation of parks and green spaces, and to ensure, through partnerships with public and private organizations, that recreation and education opportunities are available to all people.

Flint Hills Resources, LP, a subsidiary of Wichita's Koch Industries, is a leading producer of fuels and other petrochemical products based in Wichita, Kan. The company takes its name from the Flint Hills of Kansas, a scenic and culturally rich part of the Great Plains. The name honors Fred Chase Koch, co-founder of what is now Koch Industries, who had a passion for the Flint Hills and established his first ranch there in the 1940s. More information about the company is available at www.fhr.com.