



# WITTENBACH / WEGE

AGRISCIENCE AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTER

11715 VERGENNES RD, LOWELL, MI 49331 (616)987-2565

We're on the web! <http://www.lowellschools.com> go to district, departments, then Wittenbach/Wege Center

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## STAFF

Courtney Cheers—Director  
Shelley Winkels—Naturalist  
Susan Stanek—Naturalist  
Nancy McIntyre—Naturalist

## CENTER HOURS

**Monday – Friday**  
**8:00-4:00pm**

(Some exceptions may apply.)

**Sundays**

**1:00 – 4:00pm**

(Some exceptions may apply.)

## TRAILS ARE OPEN!

Get outside...dawn until dusk, 365 days a year.

Feel free to bring your dogs but please keep them **LEASHED AT ALL TIMES** and **CLEAN UP** after them.



## RECYCLE

Don't forget you can recycle your old cell phones, chargers and household batteries at the WWC. Drop them off during our open hours.



## COMMUNITY GARDEN

Thank you to everyone who rented plots this season in the Community Garden. **Please have your plots cleaned up by November 1!**

If you have questions, please contact Courtney Cheers at 616-987-2565 or [ccheers@lowellschools.com](mailto:ccheers@lowellschools.com)

We are going paperless! We hope you enjoy our first edition in a e-mail friendly format.



## **GET OUTSIDE!** **Guided Sunday Walks** **2:00pm—FREE!**

*Join our Naturalists on Sunday afternoons for a themed hike.*

*Participants should meet at the center shortly before 2:00pm*

*Registration is not required.*

- ◆ *September: White Tailed Deer*
- ◆ *October: Spiders—Silky Spinners*
- ◆ *November: Wild Turkeys*
- ◆ *December: Minks & Weasels of MI*

## **Night Hike**

**Saturday, October 25<sup>th</sup>**  
**7:00pm**

**Wittenbach/Wege Center**



*As we prepare for bed, the forest comes alive. Join us as we venture out into the forest to learn about nocturnal animals. We'll learn about some of the interesting adaptations animals have for navigating in the dark. Space is limited to 25 participants so call ahead to register. This event is free and open to the public.*

*Call 616-987-2565 to reserve your spot.*

## **Fall Tiny Trekkers**

### **Parent & Child Nature Series**

Tiny Trekkers is a nature program for children 3-6 years old and their parent, grandparent or care-giver. It includes a series of four 1.5 hour classes every Thursday for four weeks.

Each class will have a different nature-related theme and include a story, exploration hike and art project.



Cost is \$20 per family for the 4-week series. Children under 3 and homeschool families are welcomed to attend (there may be a nominal fee to cover art supplies for younger/older siblings depending on the project).

Only 10 spots are available per morning session (10:00 – 11:30 a.m.) and only 10 spots are available per afternoon session (1:00 – 2:30 p.m.) so please RSVP soon by calling 616-987-2565 or email [ccheers@lowellschools.com](mailto:ccheers@lowellschools.com). Registration deadline is October 24<sup>th</sup>.





## Season of Change...by Shelley Winkels

The summer light is fading and the focus is turning toward autumn. It's a season of change not only for plants and animals preparing for the colder months ahead but also for people. Change can be difficult and can take on different seasonal forms. Earlier this summer, the WWC staff said goodbye to the former WWC director, Meggan Johnson, and have anticipated the announcement of the new director.



The WWC staff is enthusiastic to report that the seasonal transition has been smooth since a long time staffer accepted the director position – Courtney Cheers!

Courtney and her husband are not strangers to the Lowell community. He is originally from the area and she moved here almost 20 years ago. They are raising their two children, who are now 11 years old and 9 years old. Also, Courtney is not new to the staff at WWC, just her position! Since her hire date in 2000 when the center opened, she has worked and volunteered in the capacity of a variety of educational and fun community events, including 8 years of interpretive teaching, co-directing the Junior Master Gardeners summer program, co-leading the 5<sup>th</sup> grade Garden Harvest cooking classes, and organizing the community pancake breakfast.

Along with her teaching experience at WWC, Courtney is well equipped for the challenges of the directorship by earning a degree in public administration in agriculture with an emphasis in ag-economics from Iowa State University and later earning the recognition of Master Naturalist in 2007. She is ecstatic about her new position and is eager to help shape the next chapter in the center's development. Courtney believes wholeheartedly in the WWC mission:

“To become a premiere community center for hands-on learning with a focus on the integration of agri-science and environmental studies.”

The WWC staff is looking forward to this new season of leadership. Please help us congratulate and welcome Courtney!

## A Tree For A Friend And Leader... Meggan Johnson



Susan Stanek, Shelley Winkels, Nancy McIntyre, and Sheryl Helmus plant a Linden tree .

Present and former Naturalists planted a Linden Tree to thank, recognize and remind us of all the great work and leadership provided by former Director—Meggan Johnson. It is one of Meggan's favorite trees and will hopefully live a long life here at the WWC. Located just below the pond, be sure to stop and take a look the next time you stop by.

## Where Do Green Beans Come From?

By Shelley Winkels



The summer yields a variety of produce – fruits and vegetables from farm fields or gardens that can go right to the table or be stored by freezing and canning. Whether it is a holiday, a birthday, or a gathering of family and friends, summer and fall provide great opportunities to enjoy a backyard barbeque with the season's harvest highlighting the menu.

The Wittenbach family, residents of the Lowell area for generations, worked with many community leaders to shape the beginning and the future of the Wittenbach/Wege Agriscience and Environmental Education Center. The story goes that at a family gathering a child thought that green beans came solely from the grocery store. The Wittenbach family wanted kids in their community, and beyond, to know where their food comes from and how everything is connected to the environment. Lowell still has strong ties to the agricultural community but as times change, fewer and fewer people have the opportunity to engage with our agricultural roots.

WWC was built in 2000 with funds generously donated by the Wittenbach family, with support from the Lowell Area Community Fund. Many individuals and businesses donated goods, services, and funding. Lowell Area Schools owns and operates the property. Additionally, former entrepreneur Peter Wege provided funds for adjoining land, forming the Wege Foundation Natural Area for the Study of Ecology, which is owned and operated by the Land Conservancy of West Michigan. Trails connect the two entities, totaling approximately 140 acres which are utilized for education (emphasizing agriculture and ecology), community events, and hiking throughout the year.

Today, the center continues to be supported by the generosity of the LAS Education Foundation, grants, businesses, groups, and individuals, including volunteers. All supporters firmly believe in the vision and the mission of the center: to enhance learning and personal development by becoming a premiere community center for hands-on learning with a focus on the integration of agri-science and environmental studies.

So, where do green beans come from? An answer from a student visiting WWC may be "from the grocery store." Yes, agreed; however, the discussion and the connection between their food and environment does not end there. Further investigation, along with a visit to the field, garden or greenhouse, would track the origin of green beans back to the farmer who plants seeds and gives the seeds the things they need to grow, to end up as many green beans do – on a plate to help the student grow!

WWC invites you to come and visit – to see how the center has grown over the last 14 years from its beginning as a question about green beans to the continued growth shared by the vision



## Looking Real Good...



More change at the Center. A **BIG THANKS** to **ANDERSON PAINTING** for the beautiful new paint on the trim of the Center and the Barn.

They power washed, scraped, sanded, primed, and finally painted. The result, super sharp looking buildings that look great!

# Using your Senses—ALONG THE TRAIL...

By Nancy McIntyre

The cool crisp fall weather is a great time to get out and use your senses along the trail.

**Feel** the cool breeze on your skin. Feel the wind blowing through your hair. Use your sense of touch along the prairie trail to feel the seeds from the different prairie flowers. The Burdock seeds are stiff and bristly, the dock seeds dark brown and hard. Find the fluffy seeds of milkweed, Asters and Fleabane. Feel the different textures as you walk along the vernal pond. Feel the soft texture of the fern fronds and the cattail seeds. As you back up to Chickadee Loop have a seat on the new Eagle Scout benches and listen to the beautiful songs of the chickadee, cardinal and nuthatch.

**Look** for different colors along the woodland trails. The magenta colored stems of Pokeweed are hard to miss. Look for the deep purple ripe berries – a great food source for wildlife. Use them to dye your yarn and your fingers! Please never eat these berries. Look for reptiles such as Garter snakes and ribbon snakes sunning themselves on the trails before heading underground for winter. The beautiful bright white Indian Pipes are up along the trails by the great Oak trees – but look for them late summer, early fall before they turn black and gooey. These unique plants are saprophytic and feed on fungus in the leaf litter. They can't produce any of their own food – notice there is no green color anywhere. Look for the chipmunks and squirrels running about gathering and burying nuts and seeds for winter survival.

**Smell** the crisp cool air. There may be the remnants of late flowering summer plants and the fall flowering Witch-Hazel. Find the small tree called the Sassafras along the trail. It is the tree with three different shaped leaves – mitten, a hand with a pinky and a thumb or an oval. Break apart a leaf and you will think of a root beer float. Down in the wetlands look for Spicebush with its yellow to red shiny berries. Break apart these leaves and stems and smell the lemony scent of fruit loops. Break apart some pine and spruce needles – you will be reminded of the wonderful scents of Christmas trees.

Open your ears and **hear** the sounds of the forest. The Chickadee's "chick-a-dee-dee-dee" or their cheeseburger call. Listen for the woodpeckers pounding on the trees looking for the many insects on the trunk. The loudest and most powerful woodpecker could be the great Pileated Woodpecker – look for a streak of red, black and white flying from tree to tree – the size of a crow! Fall migrants will soon be on their way but you can still hear the "jay, jay, jay" of the Blue Jay announcing a newcomer into the forest. You'll hear "birdy, birdy, birdy" call of the Cardinal and the "caw, caw" of the Common Crow. If you listen carefully you can hear the many sounds of the crisp fall breezes rustling the needles and leaves of the forest. As you descend the hill toward the creek you can hear the water before you can see it. Listen for the quiet gurgling sound as the water flows across the rocks. As you get to the creek make sure you use all of your senses – touch the cold clear water, look for frogs, fish and insects in the water. Listen for the birds and wildlife that all have to come to the creek for water. Smell the water and the soil near the creek – earthy smells abound.



**THANK YOU William Halling**, for choosing to complete your Eagle Scout project at the Wittenbach/Wege Center. The beautiful benches against the Chickadee Loop are in a perfect spot to stop for a picnic, rest weary feet, meditate, or use for class instruction. Our sincere gratitude for contributing to our outdoor classroom and your community!



## Pick The Flowers and Enjoy Them!

By Susan Stanek

Flowers have many purposes for crafts, but some also have culinary uses as well. There are different ways of preserving and preparing them according to their purpose. I enjoy making gift cards with pressed flowers, preserving parts of floral arrangements from special events, and of course eating them!

Drying flowers for an arrangement can be done several ways. The most practical way is to tie herbs or flowers with a wire, and hang upside down in a dark spot until dry. **Roses** need to be dried this way so that the leaves and flower head stay upright. Daylight tends to bleach out color, and with roses, keep in mind that they will darken as they dry, so choose a lighter color than you'd like for your arrangement. Also, as the plants dry their stems will shrink, so check it periodically in case you need to restring them, and also keep an eye out for mold. Some ferns and leafy stems can be dried this way as well.

When drying certain **grasses** make sure you pick them early because they still might turn to fluff and seed out. **Cattails** need a special trick. Again pick when they're small and immature. Dry them either upside down, or flat on news paper. Spray the seed head generously with an aerosol hair spray to keep its shape together. Some flowers like **lavender** can be dried right in the vase!

Some types of flowers are hard to dry like **daisy** types and **tulip** buds because the petals fall off. Use a powder made of half Borax and half corn starch. Suspend the flower in the powder in the position you want it to dry in. The larger the flower the longer it takes to dry, but the results should be pretty good.

Pressed flowers are great for decorative crafts. Once completely dry you can glue them to a nice piece of paper, and frame it for a gift, or to a gift card. The best flowers for this are the smaller ones, and more delicate types of flowers, like **baby's breath and violets**. We've all placed flowers or petals within the pages of a book, but if it is an important book fold a piece of paper and put the flower in that during the pressing so that the pages do not get stained.

Now let's get to the eating! I love to make candied flowers because they're great to use to decorate cakes, use in frostings, and are great served with minted grapes, or ice cream. Edible flowers are **violets, borage, rose, yucca petals, pansies, and johnny-jump-ups**, plus, some can be purchased from the store in the fresh herb aisle. All you need is wax paper, a small clean artist paint brush, one beaten egg white, and fine granulated sugar. Place flowers on wax paper, and paint egg white coating on all of the surface area. Gently sprinkle sugar on and let sit until dry. They will keep preserved like this for up to a year, but make sure they are completely dry when you store them.

Every person has gone through that moment in childhood where they have picked beautiful flowers—some innate attraction to them as humans, male or female, boy or girl. When my brother was a toddler, he came to my mother with a bouquet of daffodils. "Where did you get these?" she asked. "The neighbor's yard," he replied. At one point in our childhood, we have been told not to pick the flowers. Well, I say, pick the flowers, and enjoy them!



## Looking for Volunteers!

This Fall we are looking for volunteers to help in the following areas:

- ◆ Office and Display Projects
- ◆ Community Garden Maintenance
  - ◆ Invasive Removal
- ◆ Program Interpreters—come share your skills and passions!
  - ◆ Landscape Design for New Native Teachings Gardens

## Fall Wish List...

Birdseed, Suet, Kleenex, Craft Supplies, Native seeds or plant splits

Anyone interested in any of these opportunities, please call the center at 616-987-2565 or email Courtney Cheers at [ccheers@lowellschools.com](mailto:ccheers@lowellschools.com).

Your next newsletter will arrive in November.

