



N O U R I S H Y O U R N E E D F O R


NATURE™

WINTER 2022



THANKS TO YOU
*Dodge is
moving
forward*

D O D G E N A T U R E C E N T E R



During a fall 2021 field trip, Pete Cleary introduces Garlough elementary students to historical technologies at Shepard Farm.

DISTRICT 197 AT 100%

With a shared mission—and problem—on their minds, three educators gathered around a picnic table in a West St. Paul park.

It was summer 2020, and elementary principals Tom Benson of Pilot Knob STEM Magnet and Sue Powell of Garlough had a question for Pete Cleary, Dodge director of environmental education: *what can Dodge do?*

Students would be returning to school buildings that fall, but the pandemic would prevent field trips to any site, including Dodge. A hybrid model meant that students were on screens at home half the week and wouldn't have the same access to hands-on nature learning.

For decades, Dodge Nature Center and West St. Paul-Mendota Heights-Eagan Area Schools (ISD 197) have partnered to give environmental experiences to students in the district. Fall, winter and spring, elementary students come to Dodge for field trips. Garlough students walk across the street for weekly classes with a naturalist. Heritage E-STEM middle schoolers have regular classes with two naturalists. But how could all that continue in the pandemic?

Pete didn't hesitate.

"If you're coming back in hybrid, we will come to you," Pete recalls saying. "And we'll figure out how to reach the kids in the distance learning too."

Dodge went to work adapting its curriculum to new delivery methods. **Determined to offer education equitably across the district**, Dodge staff reached out to every school to customize programs to each building's needs. By the end of September 2020, Mendota Elementary tested the first pandemic-adapted field trip. See the timeline below for how **Dodge and the district built back** from offline to online to in-person once again.

Engaging students in environmental learning, from early childhood to early adulthood, is **made possible by a strong partnership with ISD 197 and the generosity of donors like you.** Through the challenges and uncertainties of the early pandemic, straight through to today, Dodge gives students the benefits of nature-based education—your support makes that possible.

NON-STOP NATURE LEARNING STUDENTS STAY CONNECTED WITH DODGE

- **Spring 2020** – Using cell phones and iPads, Dodge naturalists record educational videos for ISD 197 students and a general audience. Videos are available on the Dodge website and YouTube channel.
- **Fall 2020** – To provide education to all K-4 students learning in the district's hybrid model, naturalists travel to schoolyards for outdoor classes and offer interactive virtual classes with follow-up Q&A sessions. Without sufficient WiFi, naturalists stay close to buildings.
- **Winter 2020-2021** – Virtual field trips take to the woods! Thanks to mobile hot spots lent by ISD 197 and the support of generous donors, Dodge now has the technological resources for naturalists to stay online and onscreen as they virtually take classes to track animals through the snow and dissect owl pellets.
- **Spring 2021** – Garlough K-4 students are back at Dodge every week to learn with naturalist Jeff Boland. Outdoor classes in schoolyards resume, with educational animals like lambs and chicks.
- **Fall-Winter 2021** – Every ISD 197 elementary school has on-site field trips that are tailored to the seasons. Also on-site: Branch Out, plus Building Bridges, an early childhood family education program for Spanish-speaking families. Naturalists resume after-school classes, like Bird Adventure Club, through Tri-District Community Education.



Dodge donors and preschool parents
Julia and John Dittberner celebrated the
school's 20th anniversary in May 2021.

EMBRACING WHAT NATURE BRINGS PRESCHOOL PARENTS GROW THEIR SUPPORT FOR DODGE

When their son Micah's preschool switched to full-time remote learning as the pandemic worsened in 2020, Julia and John Dittberner knew there was no way their 3-year-old could form a meaningful connection with peers and teachers on a screen.

Nature-based preschool to the rescue! Dodge Nature Preschool had room for Micah, and the Dittberners were confident the outdoor learning environment would support his growth and health.

"They are outside all day and they embrace whatever nature brings," Julia says of Dodge students and teachers. "What a beautiful, organic way to learn."

As her preschooler grew confident in the woods, Julia started learning to navigate in nature, where she had never spent much time. A friend brought her to Women in the Woods, an adult education program led by naturalist Pam Welisevich, and Julia found a mentor and model for being an outdoorswoman.

"Pam is an amazing, fierce force that draws you in," Julia says. "She's nonjudgmental about what you know or don't know about nature. She meets you where you are."

An invitation to the 2021 Night for Nature benefit soon followed. "It was an easy yes for us," Julia says. "Everyone who was there loves Dodge and so do we." The Dittberners' donation that night supports students of all ages and experiences, from preschoolers to adults, as they learn in the outdoor classroom.

Now Julia is bringing her energy to the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Task Force. The members guide Dodge on applying DEI values in daily operations and educational programs.

"Nature is not always approachable," she says. "I appreciate how deliberate Dodge is being in opening up those experiences. I want to help."

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE AT DODGE

- Support preschool scholarships at Rock the Barn on May 21. Join us for the farm festival that fundraises to give every family access to nature-based preschool.
- Donate and double your gift in 2022. Thanks to generous donors, your gift will be matched dollar for dollar, and make twice the impact for people of all ages learning in nature.

Nature Activities

JANUARY 2022 - FEBRUARY 2022

For activity details and registration, visit
DodgeNatureCenter.org or call **651-455-4531**

JANUARY

Jan 12 - Feb 2	Girls Explore Science	5th-8th Graders
13	Explore the Night	Families
18	Pride Outside	5th-12th Graders
21	Nature Playdate	Pre-K
22	Reptiles & Amphibians of Minnesota	Families
25	Women in the Woods	Adults 21+
26	Women in the Woods	Adults 21+
28	Guided Trail Hike	All ages
29	Guided Trail Hike	All ages

FEBRUARY

1	Pride Outside	5th-12th Graders
5	Building with Snow	Families
15	Pride Outside	5th-12th Graders
19	Winter Fun Fest	All ages
21	Guided Trail Hike	All ages



Winter Fun Fest

FEBRUARY 19, 2022 | 2 - 5 P.M.
FREE ADMISSION AND ACTIVITIES
SLEIGH RIDES, BOOT HOCKEY, SNOW SPORTS AND MORE
FARM ENTRANCE: 1701 CHARLTON STREET, WEST ST. PAUL

COSPONSORED BY THE SOUTH ROBERT STREET BUSINESS ASSOCIATION AND CITY OF WEST ST. PAUL



Dodge's resident raptors live in the Voight Raptor Mews, a gift from Don and Jan Voight in honor of their parents, Otto and Minnie Voight and Robert and Mary Dombrock.

Big News at the Raptor Mews

Mew, noun

1 :an enclosure for hawks — usually used in plural

A bird's eye view of the nature center is better than ever now that two new raptors have arrived at Dodge. In October, a red-tailed hawk and a great horned owl joined the bald eagle and barred owl in the Voight Raptor Mews on the main property. All four birds have injuries that prevent them from being returned to the wild. They will serve as winged ambassadors and receive excellent lifelong care at Dodge.

The hawk resembles a certain red-haired hero, so she's been named "Anna." She is approximately 5 years old and has an eye injury. "Elsa" the great horned owl is about 10 years old and has a damaged wing that cannot be rehabilitated.

"It's very exciting to have four birds filling the mews again," says Pam Welisevich, a naturalist and animal care coordinator at Dodge for more than 18 years. "And to have four different species."

In her time at Dodge, Pam has enjoyed working with a variety of raptors, including a golden eagle and a turkey vulture. She was trained in their care and management by the internationally renowned Raptor Center at the University of Minnesota.

Pam obtained the new birds from a Michigan wildlife rehabilitator, after they were found injured within a few miles of the center. As all raptors are federally protected species, Dodge must maintain special permits from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

What's next for the new birds?

"They'll spend winter adjusting to life at Dodge," Pam says. "In the spring, they'll get a checkup and vaccinations at the Raptor Center. It is stressful experience for birds, so they only go once a year."

As the birds acclimate to the sights and sounds of the nature center, Pam is also gaining their trust, a process that takes time and patience.

"If a bird is food-motivated, as the hawk is, they're easier to train," she says. "I hope someday they can be part of the education team and help us teach people about raptors and Minnesota wildlife."

But even if they are not a good fit for field trips or going on the road with naturalists to present programs, Pam says the **raptors help demonstrate the importance of protecting the environment and wild bird populations** by giving people the opportunity to view them outdoors, 365 days a year.

While the raptors will surely see you before you see them—their eyesight is four to five times better than humans'—Pam says it's very important to have calm bodies and quiet voices around them, so you don't stress them.

That's sound advice on how to respect raptors—and it's equally true at the mews and in the wild.

