



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

# NATURE™

FALL 2022



A New Nature  
Destination  
THANKS TO YOU

D O D G E   N A T U R E   C E N T E R





Luisana Mendez of Huellas Latinas leads families on a Spanish-language hike on Shepard Farm trails on Saturday, April 2, 2022

# SHEPARD FARM STEPPING FORWARD

The early spring temps were too cold for honey bees, but there was certainly a buzz in the air at the April 2 opening of Shepard Farm's trails.

All afternoon, a steady stream of people arrived to explore this new nature destination in Cottage Grove. There were both longtime fans and new friends: neighbors within walking distance, Dodge Nature Preschool families, city officials, and curious passersby.

"The excitement of the day was a new community coming to see what's behind the Shepard Farm curtain," says executive director Jason Sanders.

Every hour of opening day, naturalists led hikes on fresh (and muddy!) trails. Fifty people flocked to a Spanish-language hike with Luisana Mendez of partner organization Huellas Latinas, Dodge farmer Jorge Espinoza and naturalist Leah Darst. Hikers helped identify wildlife for a BioBlitz, a community science project to give researchers data on species living in this region.

All those boots on the springtime trails represent a major step forward for Shepard Farm. Since acquiring the 140-acre property from the Wilder Foundation in 2013, Dodge Nature Center has reimagined it as an environmental and agricultural learning resource.

Thoughtful and steady development by Dodge honors the historic character of the land while adding classroom space, public restrooms, vehicle access and modern facilities for farm animals.

As of April, trails are open to the public for daily use. Free guided hikes and family nature programs are offered monthly. Adult classes include beekeeping and backyard chicken raising. This coming school year, field trip students will engage in STEM classes like historical technology.

"Dodge will be doing what it does well," Jason says. "But also pushing into new and bold directions at Shepard." One such direction is from farm to table. In a large teaching kitchen, people of all ages will learn to prepare vegetables, fruit, eggs, and honey cultivated in this rich landscape.

In its care of Shepard Farm, Dodge will foster wildlife habitat, preserve a piece of community history, and reinvigorate this special place for the interests of 21st-century students. "It's our time to create exceptional experiences in nature for the Cottage Grove community," says Jason. It's your support—as a student, visitor, and donor—that makes that possible.

"This was one family's special place. Now it's yours."

*On the cover: The Seim family of Cottage Grove attended the opening of Shepard Farm.*

## THE YEAR AHEAD

- Transforming the historic home into an Education Center with classrooms, teaching kitchen (pictured here), restrooms and offices—opening summer 2023!
- Offering more field trips, day camps, family programs and adult classes in every season. Visit [DodgeNatureCenter.org/activities](https://DodgeNatureCenter.org/activities) to see what's new to do at Shepard.
- Moving livestock into a new pole barn and pastures at the corner of 70th St. S. and Jamaica Ave.
- Bringing chickens to a restored historic coop and domestic turkeys to a building constructed by young adults from the GAP School in St. Paul.







*Helen Wells O'Brien of St. Paul visits Shepard Farm in Cottage Grove to see Dodge branching out in new directions and locations.*

# Nature Activities

## SEPTEMBER 2022 - OCTOBER 2022

For activity details and registration, visit [DodgeNatureCenter.org](https://DodgeNatureCenter.org) or call 651-455-4531

### SEPTEMBER

|    |   |                    |
|----|---|--------------------|
| 8  | Guided Trail Hike at Shepard Farm       | All ages           |
| 8  | Forest Bathing                          | Adults             |
| 9  | Dodge in the Dark                       | Families           |
| 9  | Guided Trail Hike at Main Property      | All ages           |
| 12 | Bees to Mead                            | Adults, 21+        |
| 13 | Nature After Dinner                     | Families           |
| 16 | Nature Playdate                         | Pre-K              |
| 17 | Down on the Dodge Farm                  | Families           |
| 18 | Wild Pride                              | Adults, 16+        |
| 19 | Green Seniors                           | Seniors            |
| 20 | Pride Outside                           | 5th - 12th graders |
| 20 | Registration opens for Fall Break Camps | Families           |
| 21 | Girls Explore Science                   | 5th- 8th graders   |
| 22 | Night for Nature Annual Benefit         | Adults             |

### OCTOBER

|        |   |                   |
|--------|---|-------------------|
| 4      | Nature After Dark                           | Families          |
| 7 - 17 | Tranquility on the Trails                   | All ages          |
| 11     | Women in the Woods                          | Adults, 21+       |
| 14     | Nature Playdate                             | Pre-K             |
| 20-21  | Fall Break Camps                            | 1st - 8th graders |
| 20     | Guided Trail Hike at Main Property          | All ages          |
| 21     | Guided Trail Hike at Shepard Farm           | All ages          |
| 21     | Best of Dodge Day Camp                      | Adults            |
| 22     | Guided Trail Hike at Lilly Property         | All ages          |
| 26     | Girls Explore Science: Spooktacular Animals | 5th- 8th graders  |
| 27     | Wild Pride                                  | Adults, 16+       |
| 29     | Halloween Extravaganza at Shepard Farm      | Families          |



## DEEP-ROOTED SUPPORT

Helen Wells O'Brien knows well that big things start small.

A resident of St. Paul's West Side and retired hospital chaplain, Helen comes from a conservation-minded family. In the 1950s, her parents purchased 18 acres of former farmland in South Carolina. "Essentially a rolling hill of hard rock and thin, worn-out topsoil," she describes it. With steady determination, Helen's father replenished the land by planting 8,000 loblolly pines and other tree species over his lifetime.

"The kind of living sanctuary I experience at Dodge reminds me of those 18 acres," she says.

Wanting to support the nature center where she hikes and birdwatches, Helen started donating monthly. As Dodge launches a monthly giving program, the SEED Circle, it's clear Helen is the foundational member.

She's given every month for 17 years, long before there was an easy automated way to do so.

"I decided on monthly sustained giving in order to give back a little of what Dodge was giving to me," Helen says. "And also, to honor what my mother and father gave to our family through the restoration of the land we grew up on."

Her father's seedlings are now a forest, strong and tall. Loblolly pines climb 90 feet to the sky. They live for centuries.

Helen's monthly gifts are long-lasting and far-reaching, too. Her support for Dodge is growing the next generation of environmental stewards.

## YOU CAN CULTIVATE THE SEED CIRCLE

A seed starts small, but with time, it takes root and grows strong. It supports human and animal life around it—just as your recurring donation does.

Giving a small amount every month is a budget-friendly way to make a big impact for environmental learners of all ages. When you join the SEED Circle, you're providing Dodge Nature Center and Preschool with a sustainable source of support—thank you!

It's easy to start your monthly gift. Return the enclosed form or visit [DodgeNatureCenter.org/monthly](https://DodgeNatureCenter.org/monthly) to set your monthly donation level.





Dodge seasonal naturalist Allie Steffen was a Naturalist Fellow when she created the Pride Outside and Wild Pride programs to welcome the LGBTQIA+ community to the nature center.

**"Let's build an environment that is welcoming for all. It's so important to have a large community involved in protecting the world we live in and enjoying beautiful outdoor spaces together."**

Allie Steffen  
Naturalist Fellow, Dodge Nature Center

# TAKING PRIDE in NATURE

As a Naturalist Fellow, Allie Steffen connected with students in after-school programs at Friendly Hills Middle School in Mendota Heights. It got her thinking about what she had wanted to learn when she was their age. The answer was easy: it was all about the outdoors.

Her love for nature propelled her to study biology at Carthage College and earn a graduate certificate in environmental education from Hamline University. Her year living and learning as a Naturalist Fellow at Dodge deepened her knowledge of the natural world and "taught her to teach" students of all ages.

But she knew that not every young person has the opportunities she had. Earlier this year at a program-planning meeting, Allie spoke up about a gap she thought Dodge could help fill: LGBTQIA+ youth in our community need more outdoor opportunities and places to be themselves.

Her colleagues told her, "Go for it!" So, she built Pride Outside, a nature and outdoor skills program for 5th-12th grade youth of any sexual or gender identity.

"No one knows who they are quite yet at that age," Allie says. "But at Dodge, I want kids to know they can be themselves and they're welcome, no matter what."

The response to Pride Outside was swift and enthusiastic. When the first session filled, Allie quickly sought help from fellow naturalists so Dodge didn't have to turn anyone away. The twice monthly program has drawn dozens of students from 10 different schools—public, private and home-based—including from as far as Woodbury.

Everyone is encouraged to bring friends and classmates. Thanks to generous donors and the Nourishing Everyone's Need for Nature campaign focus on increasing access, the program is free for all participants.

"Extracurricular activities often cost a lot," Allie says. "We didn't want money to stand in the way of any kid coming to Dodge."

What's a typical afternoon at Pride Outside? They begin with introductions and share their pronouns. Then they get outside to explore an array of environmental topics, including wilderness skills, sustainable farming, and climate change.

But the primary experience? Allie says it's all about "curiosity, chatter and casual conversation." While hiking and hanging out at the nature center, young people are asking questions about the natural world around them and forging new friendships.

"Beyond building their outdoor skills, my huge goal is to be a supportive adult," she says. "I want to be someone they can rely on."

Allie's support for young people and the LGBTQIA+ community is clear. On July 9, she and coworkers Leah Darst and Fionn Warren brought animal activities to a local celebration, West St. Paul Pride in the Park. Organizers surprised Allie by naming her West St. Paul Pride Community Advocate of the Year.

