

# Nature Center, area businesses preserve wildlife

**A**n innovative program at the Kalamazoo Nature Center is about to celebrate its second birthday. In September 1998, KNC launched the Community Wildlife Program to assist businesses, golf courses, local governments and private landowners in the understanding, enhancement and preservation of wildlife habitats on their grounds as well as to educate those who use the property about the natural environment.

The program's focus is on establishing and maintaining grasslands and wetlands to enhance habitat for birds, insects and other wildlife in a region that is developing swiftly. Nature Center biologists have been doing these sorts of consultations for some time, but the program is now more formalized and is slowly expanding.

CWP biologists survey and monitor each property for plant and animal species present and recommend such habitat improvements as nest-box installation and native plantings. In addition to implementing these recommendations or assisting



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property owners to do so, the CWP can also assist landowners in obtaining wildlife habitat certification for their properties.

The CWP's primary clients are golf courses and corporations. The program works with 10 different golf courses operated by five golf organizations, including Gull Lake View Golf Club, Gull Lake Country Club, Kalamazoo Country Club, The Moors Golf Club and Egypt Valley Country Club.

According to Steve Allen, Community Wildlife Program director, golf course nest boxes have been very successful in contributing to the local populations of Eastern bluebirds and tree swallows in the past two years, raising over 1,500 fledglings (birds that are just able to fly)

each season.

Allen encourages golf courses to keep track of the different types of wildlife that visit their property, including different species of birds, butterflies and dragonflies, to assist in evaluating habitat diversity and the success of wildlife-management activities.

The benefits of this work are felt both by golf-course professionals as well as the natural world. Introducing native plants protects water resources and reduces energy and water consumption as well as the need for herbicides, pesticides and fertilizers.

In addition, the renewal of natural landscapes and the corresponding increase in diversity of wildlife provide interesting and attractive settings and environmental education opportunities for golf course users. Allen plans to begin installing "Nature Spots," or information stations which will interpret the surrounding environment for golfers at selected courses this fall.

The Community Wildlife

Program's corporate partners include Pharmacia Corp., the largest landholder in Kalamazoo. Pharmacia has been working with the Nature Center for several years on habitat management and now has enthusiastic employee participation in wildlife monitoring and habitat development.

Pharmacia, along with Gull Lake View Golf Club, was recognized by the Nature Center as an environmental leader in an awards ceremony held in conjunction with Dr. Jane Goodall's visit to Kalamazoo in April.

Another corporate partner with heavy employee involvement in the Community Wildlife Program is DENSO Manufacturing of Michigan. Last fall, DENSO associates planted a native wildflower garden at the company's Battle Creek site. The garden is a success story: well-established in its first year, it has been attracting hummingbirds and a variety of butterflies. It is also a source of pride for the associates who planted it, and others find it an attractive and interesting spot to

visit on lunches and breaks.

Increased employee and community enrichment is one goal of the CWP, and it relates closely to the Nature Center's mission of inspiring people to care for the environment by providing experiences that lead them to understand their connection to the natural world. By involving workers, golf-course users and community groups in wildlife habitat enhancement, the CWP provides more people with positive contact with the natural world that demonstrates their connections to nature.

For more information about the Community Wildlife Program or to schedule a complimentary initial site visit, call Steve Allen at 381-1574, ext. 26.

*KIT ALMY is community relations coordinator for the Kalamazoo Nature Center. Her opinion column about the nature center alternates with others about the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts, the Kalamazoo Public Library, the Kalamazoo Valley Museum and the Kalamazoo Aviation History Museum.*