



# NEWSLETTER



## *Musings from our President— Liz Matthes*

This winter has been one of odd occurrences for many in the state of Texas and we are seeing all sorts of changes in education. Sadly, many districts will be deeply affected by the upcoming budget issue. I want to try to entice you to do all you can to budget this summer for the wonderful TOEA weekend in spite of dwindling available money.

Like many I know I have been paying my own way to TOEA for 10 years now. That is partly due to budget cuts in my schools. But mostly it is because **I need** to feel the fresh air on my face, **I need** to see old friends that I don't see in my district, **I need** to rejuvenate my soul by exploring and communing with nature and **I need** to get a breather from the start of a new year and new students. So I am being selfish. I encourage you to plan on being more selfish too. Come this summer, start putting away your mental health money in an untouchable fund. Do less for others and help them at the same time. Imagine the money spent on pizza and sodas for your family that make them gain weight, being better spent on your TOEA weekend. This is one time you can justify being less thoughtful and more self-involved!!!

Seriously though, I hope to see many more at the HEB Foundation camp for a glorious weekend retreat of learning and relaxing. See you in October!



Come and enjoy the relaxing atmosphere while obtaining new ideas  
at our fall work shop 2011.

## Calling All Officer Candidates

Karen Howden



TOEA is interested in *you* becoming an officer. The positions for 2011 are President - Elect, Vice-President of Public Relations and Recording Secretary. In a nutshell:

The **President-Elect** reviews the previous workshop information, coordinates the food service at the workshop, presides at the Executive Board meetings in the absence of the President and is the President's understudy in preparation for assuming the duties of that office.

The **Vice-President for Public Relations** is primarily responsible for assembling and producing the quarterly newsletter and providing information to the webmaster to update the website. The **VP-Public Relations** also works to gather information on outdoor activities and opportunities for publication to our members and chairs the committee to select outstanding outdoor education programs for awards.

The **Recording Secretary** is primarily responsible for taking the minutes of each meeting and then preparing and distributing the minutes to the other Officers. The Recording Secretary maintains various records until they can be transferred to the archives.

**Although these are the primary responsibilities of each officer, it has been my experience you will not be alone in your endeavors. The Executive Board works together and with the input of past officers, the duties are easily maintained. Please consider stepping up a notch in your participation in TOEA. Contact me at [Jhowdenc@comcast.net](mailto:Jhowdenc@comcast.net) or at 361-986-1268 for information and for your name to be included on this year's ballot.**



## Where is outdoor education going in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

Editorial by Past-President, Julie Singleton

In previous articles, I have reviewed Richard Louv's *Last Child in the Woods* and David Sobel's *Place-based Education*. I found them informative and inspirational for outdoor educators. As many of you know, I am working on my dissertation and I have been researching the benefits of nature experiences. It seems that outdoor programs are being phased out just when we need them the most. I want to provide evidence that the benefits of being outside the classroom are far reaching and that learning in a multisensory, holistic way is more important than test scores. That character development will lead to self-regulated learners who will even care about achievement and reaching goals in school or in life. I want to justify what we all know is considered a fringe educational approach. We are outside the school walls literally and figuratively. Research is one way to work our way back into the mainstream, to engage in the larger conversation of curriculum and instruction, we have to prove our point. If something as simple as taking students outdoors can get them excited enough to personally engage themselves in the learning process, then it is worth investigating.

Outdoor educators know that something happens to people in natural landscapes. Because of the challenge of natural environments, individuals become more self-reliant, responsible and reflective. They grow through the social interaction at camp, on trail, around a fire, under a star filled night sky. They grow on rock walls, on white water rivers, on steep mountain trails. They change and are transformed, but this qualitative phenomenon is difficult to measure and explain. It has been referred to as 'the black box' of outdoor, experiential education. Many are trying to discover what is in the black box, what are the learning theories and where is the empirical evidence that supports learning in nature. There is some new research that shows that learning in the outdoors can raise test scores and reduce behavioral problems. This is one of the ways we can win over administrators and school boards. I would like to share with the membership how to access this research.

I would like to recommend two websites that are chalk full of research and theory related to outdoor, experiential education. The first is the Children and Nature Network found at <http://www.childrenandnature.org/> . This is a movement that is an out-growth from Louv's work. He and several others presented a report to Congress on the *Leave No Child Indoors* legislation that has been floundering in Congress for the past three years. This website presents all the research that Louv used to write his book and the report to Congress. It also provides a network to connect with others of like mind, locally and across the country. It offers ways to get involved. I highly recommend this website-check it out.

The other website is called Wilderdom and is found at: <http://wilderdom.com/>. It is an Australian site and outdoor education is still happening in Australia. It not only offers research, writings on theory and practice, activities (such as lists of initiatives with instructions and variations of well-known initiatives), outdoor education news, but also extensive links to other helpful sites. Challenge course folks will find this to be a rich resource and well worth your time.

So where is outdoor education going in the 21th century? The answer is nowhere if we who love teaching in the outdoors and nurturing young people to grow and to shine do not promote our passion and craft. The high-stakes testing environment does not help our cause. The focus should be on the learner, not the scores. The focus should be on providing a meaningful, value-laden education rather than on schooling that is a mile long and an inch deep.

We maverick outdoor educators may have to conform a bit, but we have to get our foot in the door to affect changes. TOEA's dwindling numbers are a reflection of the loss of outdoor programming in our state. So, come on. Spread the word; bring a new friend to the conference this year. Talk up outdoor education with your colleagues and administrators. Take some kids on a field trip or even camping. Go to the extra effort of arranging for a community-based project such as naturalizing school grounds or a food garden. Make partnerships outside the school walls and build a bigger school community. Become the teacher you idealized you would be, really touch the lives of your students and the future. Let's get involved!

The following are images of the pages mentioned in the article.

<http://www.childrenandnature.org/>

<http://wilderdom.com/>

## **Congratulations to Erik Silvius – New Outdoor Educator Coordinator**

We are pleased to announce that Erik Silvius will be starting a new position starting January 2011. Many of you may know Erik from the TOEA fall workshops, he and his brother provide and instruct the kayaking every year.

The following is an announcement sent to the TOEA Board from Foundation Free Camps.

*We are pleased to announce that Erik Silvius has accepted the position of Outdoor Education Coordinator, reporting to John Kerr, Director of Foundation Free Camps. Erik will begin after the first of the New Year, as he finishes this school semester in Seguin where he is currently a teacher. He and his family will be moving to Kerrville at that time.*

*Erik will be serving in a newly established capacity, using his knowledge and experience from previously developing an outdoor education program. The program he has been teaching in since 2003 has received the Texas Outdoor Education Association's Outstanding Program Award. Erik has a strong belief in the power of outdoor education, and this has been recognized with Distinguished Service Awards from Texas Lutheran University and the honor of Recreation Professional of the Year by Texas Association of Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance.*

*His excitement to add outdoor education experiences accessible to larger groups of children and young adults is inspiring and aligns very well with the core purpose of the Foundation. Please join us in welcoming Erik to the Foundation.*

John Kerr  
Director, Foundation Free Camps  
Foundations For Laity Renewal



### **3rd Annual Get Outdoors! Event**

It has been brought to my attention that there is a great event that has been taking place in Texas for the past two years, the Get Outdoors Event. The Get Outdoors Event is held in San Antonio, Texas during the spring, this year's date is March 5<sup>th</sup> 2011. TOEA will be participating in the event this year, Gary Guenther, Executive Secretary, will be hosting a booth that will give information on TOEA as well as offer a Lasso Golf game for participants to play. He is also donating four books for door prizes; "I Love Dirt!: 52 Activities to Help You and Your Kids Discover the Wonders of Nature", by Jennifer Ward "Let's Go Outside!: Outdoor Activities and Projects to Get You and Your Kids Closer to Nature" by Jennifer Ward, "Sharing Nature with Children, 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition" and "Sharing Nature With Children II" by Joseph Cornell. If you would like to know more about this upcoming event, visit their website [http://www.sara-tx.org/events/get\\_outdoors\\_event.php](http://www.sara-tx.org/events/get_outdoors_event.php). I hope that everyone in the San Antonio area are able to get a chance to go visit.

### **Welder Wildlife Refuge Foundation**

Field Trips and Education Programs

The Welder Wildlife Foundation provides innovative hands-on, field-based, science programs to grades K-12 throughout the year. The Foundation's student programs generally consist of 1 or 2 days of conservation class and field activities focused on south Texas ecology. Each program is adapted to the specific needs of the group. We are happy to work closely with teachers to customize their curriculum needs and incorporate TEKS into our program. Programs often include some of the following topics: south Texas vertebrate ecology and management, brush and wildlife habitat management, wetland ecology, invertebrate ecology, GPS use, and wildflower identification. Individual request by teachers are encouraged. Our education programs may include activities from Rangelands©, Project WILD, Project Flying WILD, Project WILD Aquatic, and Project Learning Tree.

The Refuge has two nature trails which are used to demonstrate succession in south Texas, dichotomous key use, landscape ecology principles, and wildlife and land management practices on a working cattle ranch. Kayaking is available, if weather permits, to explore our extensive wetland system. In addition, the Refuge provides migratory birds with valuable habitat in winter, affording school groups a unique opportunity to explore the ecology of wetlands and waterfowl. Staff members of our conservation education program are available to visit your classroom and speak on any of the above topics.

For more information please call: 361-364-2643

or

E-mail us: [conservationeducator@welderwildlife.org](mailto:conservationeducator@welderwildlife.org)

## Summary of Executive Board Meeting January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2011

Presented by Betty Fredrick – Recording Secretary

The TOEA Executive Board met in Victoria on January 8<sup>th</sup> with all members present.

Reports were received from each Board member and the Executive Secretary. Plans for the upcoming year dominated the discussion at the meeting.

The 2011 annual operating budget was adopted and reflects moderate growth while still maintaining the slowly increasing reserves for the association. The Executive Board also voted to renew the contract for the Executive Secretary through January 2013.

The duties and responsibilities for members of the Executive Board were discussed as well as the work plan for the annual workshop.

The Board members discussed attending the Get Outdoors Festival in San Antonio on March 5<sup>th</sup> to expose TOEA to more individuals/teachers.

The next board meeting will be held on May 14<sup>th</sup> at 9:00 am. in Victoria, Texas.

### TOEA Board of Directors



TOEA Board listed left to right

Front row-Karen Howden Past President,  
Liz Matthes President, Esther Lopez  
President-Elect, Suzanne Walker V.P.  
Membership Back row- Betty Fredrick  
Recording Secretary, Randy Reese V.P.  
Finance

On January 8, 2011 the TOEA board met to discuss the coming year.

**Texas Outdoor Education Association**  
**PO Box 335**  
**Harper, TX 78631-0335**

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We're on Facebook! 

TOEA has a Facebook account, you do not need a Facebook account or be a member of our TOEA Group on Facebook to see our page. I have recently uploaded several pictures to TOEA's group page. Please feel free to visit the page and comment on the pictures or tag yourself. Members of the TOEA group can also upload their own pictures of the TOEA workshop. Feel free to join our TOEA Facebook and look for updates posted by the board and your fellow educators.

