

Launching the Vision of an Evergreen Nature Center

 evergreenaudubon.org/launching-the-vision-of-an-evergreen-nature-center

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Leaders and members of The Evergreen Naturalists Audubon Society (hereafter Evergreen Audubon) had a long-standing vision of establishing a nature center in the Evergreen area. In the mid-1990s, Evergreen Audubon signed a lease with the Evergreen Park and Recreation District (EPRD) to use the Old Boat House/Warming Hut as a nature center, but the structure was destroyed partially by fire soon after. It took over a decade to complete renovation and in August 2006, we began negotiations with the EPRD board and staff for use of the restored Warming Hut. By May 2007, a small committee, consisting of Brad Andres, Dave Balogh, Ginny Boschen, Peggy Durham, Carolyn Fraker, Heather Johnson, Walt Phillips, David Wald, and Lisa Wald, had developed an initial business plan for a nature center. After lots of wrangling about the terms of a lease, Evergreen Audubon President Peggy Durham signed an agreement with the EPRD in October 2007. We were off and running with Evergreen's nature center.

On the advice of Tim Sandsmark of Lookout Mountain Nature Center, we reached out to the Association of Nature Center Administrators (ANCA) to undertake a formal consultation for us, which took place in December 2007. The ANCA consult was a standard review and evaluation procedure for organizations developing nature centers at a grass-roots level. The ANCA consultants gathered input from Evergreen Audubon members, EPRD board and staff, and other community members and drafted a set of recommendations. After the reviewing the consultants' recommendations, we revised our business plan to include a stronger emphasis on paid staff.

The spring of 2008 was spent obtaining exhibit materials from members and colleagues, such as the Denver Museum of Nature and Science, for the Evergreen Nature Center. The relationship with the museum led to obtaining the impressive mountain lion mount. For those who do not know, she was legally shot in Vail, purchased by a couple in New York City, relocated to Florida, and carted in the back of a Chevette from Florida to Evergreen by friends of Carmon Slater and Donald Randall. We hired Carolyn Fraker to help with the management of setting up the nature center. Heather and I made a trip to Kansas to bring back the touch table and her taxidermy friends from Wyoming donated a lot of items to put on the table. The committee was also busy designing brochures, developing programming and advertising, procuring items through the gift store (with the help of John and Diane Sears), and hiring our first director, Michael Stills. Carmon Slater spent his spring building furniture and the partition for our partial space in the Warming Hut and many others contributed their time and talent. We opened the Evergreen Nature Center for the first time on Earth Day, April 19, 2008. We launched the concept of Visitor Assistants, volunteers who would actively engage visitors to enhance their ENC experience, on our opening day.

We held our first ENC Bash on June 11, 2008 at the Lake House. Thanks to Polly Phillips, Sylvia Robertson, and Jane Conrad our “Connect with Nature Friendraiser” was attended by 75 people and raised \$8,803 for the new nature center. By the end of the summer, we had 14,208 people that had participated in ENC programs (564 people) or dropped in to enjoy the ENC exhibits (13,644 people). In the fall, we received our first SCFD grant (\$7,679). Overall, our successful first year provided a strong base for the future. The EPRD renewed our annual lease for 2009, and, as many of you know, we now have a five-year agreement with EPRD. The solid foundation laid in 2008 has allowed the building of expanded programming though the ENC and new Education Center.

As we celebrate the completion of ten years of continuous operation of the Evergreen Nature Center, we send sincere thanks to all of you who have volunteered numerous hours as a Visitor Assistant, consistently contributed financially to the ENC maintenance and expansion, and worked tirelessly behind the scenes. I apologize for omitting any key people who helped established the ENC.

Brad Andres