

ALONG THE WAY...

Naturalist's Notes

By *Gretta Reischauer, Director*

I have noticed that many of my December newsletters start with how the year flew by, or how time flies when you're busy or having fun. Not the case for 2020. It's been a LONG year for everyone, I know. It has been a very slow one for Threshold.

Last year at this time, we were looking at a very full calendar filled with several weddings, graduations, school groups, volunteer work days, an active after school group, a full summer line-up, and our second Fresh Air Concert fundraiser. By the beginning of April, we had lost it all. EVERYTHING had been cancelled or put on hold. \$4800 that we were expecting to make March-June was gone. This may not sound like much to many of you, but to put this into perspective, our annual budget is around \$20,000. Half of our income each year comes from generous donations from people like you and small grants...so \$4800 was nearly ¼ of our income. Pretty devastating. During the 3 month quarantine, Jacob and I had a lot of time to work on trees and trails, though. We finally got patches of the woods cleaned up from 7 years ago when we got hit with a tornado. It actually was a wonderful, peaceful spring where I got to enjoy what Threshold has to offer as well as work alongside my boy who is the same age as TLC - 18. We've told him several times the story about bringing him home from the hospital and how we had to make a pit-stop at the bank to sign all the paperwork for buying the land. We put together a protocol for trying to safely move ahead with our summer activities, and camps were starting to fill. Things were looking up.

The highlight of my year was our Fresh Air Concert in June. It was the first day of summer, we had a full summer schedule ahead of us, it was a gorgeous day, we had lots of people from all over central Iowa, great food, and fantastic acts. We had everything set for a fun and safe day: everyone wore a mask when they got close to others or went inside the barn for food or restrooms; every group was placed 20 feet away from each other (the advantage of an outdoor venue); the artists all had their own microphones; and there was sanitizer galore. The whole day went off without a hitch. Thanks to our sponsors, volunteers, and bands, we were able to raise over \$2,000. This made up almost half of our losses from the quarantine, which was very nice. For me, however, it was the feel of the day. I was so proud of everyone who came. They just masked up - no questions asked, no arguments. People were so excited to see one another again, so there were smiles and waves, laughter, and dancing. The grassy hill was littered with blankets, camp chairs, coolers, and bodies relaxing in the sun. It wasn't littered in litter, however, everyone did a great job of picking up their trash and taking care of TLC! Children ran around playing with bubbles, throwing balls, hiking the trails, or visiting the creek. The whole day just really had a Woodstock feel to it - a day of peace and music. 😊 Just what we were going for.

Our summer also went smoothly. We had to cancel our first two trips since they were too early in June and also had to cap all of our day camps to only 10 campers. Other than that, with masks and hand sanitizer in our packs, we were able to do all the fun activities we normally do. We also became a very popular place to stay overnight for people looking for a safe and different way to travel during this pandemic. We are part of an on-line resource called Hipcamp that matches us up with people who are looking for a place to camp. It's been great! We first used it to find unique places to stay during our trips: farms, treehouses, yurts, boats, etc. Last year we decided to try it the other way and rent a few sites for camping and also the barn for overnights. We were fairly busy with one or two groups staying each week. This helped us make a little money for our trip fund and we met interesting people from all over the country. We now have people in California, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, the Twin Cities, KC, Chicago, Texas, Indiana, and Florida talking about their stay in a cute little barn in Iowa. Word of mouth is the best form of advertising!

Summer programming ended with an eventful trip to Maine. The kids who went were so excited to see the ocean, some of them for the first time. We just kept going back to play in it, every day! They helped raise the mast on a ship, saw animals they have never seen before, climbed cliffs, ate blueberries, hiked trails, took a speedboat ride, teased/tormented hermit crabs, hit the boardwalk, ate seafood, searched for moose and sculpted many works of art in the sand. I have gone on and on in the past about how neat, funny, well-behaved and talented this group of kids is. They are all such great ambassadors. They're good about wearing a mask everywhere, watching for others, holding open doors, remembering to watch their language in public and please and thank-yous. That alone has made me want to take them anywhere, anytime. I'm always impressed by how they have embraced the spirit of these trips and want to learn about other people. They will see someone acting "weird" by Iowa standards and instead of laughing and pointing or loudly saying something to them, they will ask Hannah or I, "Why was that woman putting her arms out like that? Why are those guys eating like that? Why don't people wave or make eye contact? Wouldn't it be cool to just drive a speedboat for a living?" They listen to the answer, learn, and assess. Now, sometimes their final decision is still, "Well, she's crazy!" But they have learned something outside their little box, and they are all willing to share that knowledge. We always have a go-with-the-flow attitude on our trips, but this year we had to go-with-the-Covid-flow, which was stressful. Places would not be open, reservations were not kept, small towns with adorable eateries during the summer months had nothing but convenience stores open. Never a complaint about hunger, needing a bathroom, being cold, being hot - nothing. Not even when the RV broke down on the way home and we had to wait at a gas station for 8 hours or when the RV's tire blew and we were stranded on the side of the Interstate for 12 hours (that's another 3-page story) Nothing but patience and concern from this crew, I love them all. In the end, we all survived. I choose to remember the great parts of our trip and agree with Aydin who says, "...but we can laugh about it now, right Gretta?"

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THANK YOU...THANK YOU...THANK YOU!!!

...TO OUR CONTRIBUTING MEMBERS...

GREAT HORNED OWL LEVEL (\$1,000+)

Jeff & Jennifer Cook**
Mark & Gretta Reischauer*****+
Bill & Sharron Slinger***+

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* *Indicates renewing member*

+ *Indicates renewing member for 10 or more years!*

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Sharron & Bill Slinger
Julie Slinger
Steve & ElJean Wildeboer Trust
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...and the wonderful acts who shared their time, equipment, and talents to help us make it a great day. As if that wasn't enough, several of the bands and some band members wouldn't let us pay them in the end, they donated it back to Threshold! Thank you soooooo much!



TLC NEWS

BOARD MEMBERS AND VOLUNTEERS NEEDED AT TLC

Won't you consider helping TLC move forward as a Board Member? We have around 4 meetings per year and would like your help at our 3 annual events in April, June and October. If you think that being a board member will be too much, maybe just consider being a volunteer. We need everything: manual labor, carpentry help, extra hands during summer camp, grant writing, fundraising, website design, mowing, cleaning, painting, gardening, and more. Contact us to discuss ways you could help or join us at our Annual meeting on February 7th at 4pm at the barn.

THANK YOU! THANK YOU!

- To everyone who contributed to the Travel Fund –Christa Anderson & Terry Potter in memory of Barbara Jeanne Decker - it was much needed this year.
- Peggy and David Obrecht who paid to have our barn painted. It looks GREAT!
- Lindsay and True North Insurance for donating the down payment needed to renew our coverage for this year.
- The Niemeyer Family for their great lead on 4 new canoes and A TRAILER!!! I can't begin to tell you how wonderful it was to just back up to a hitch and go and to have enough canoes for once.
- Lori and Cathy Mein for their donation in memory of their mom, Nettie. Nettie was one of our first supporters here in town, and she continued to send her support in donations and kind notes throughout the years. It was so nice of the girls to think we were worthy of such a fine woman's memorial funds.

WRITE OFF YOUR 2020 DONATION

The tax code from a few years ago took away the ability to write off any donations you make to charities if you take the Standard Deduction. This year, in light of the pandemic, they are allowing people to deduct up to \$300. As part of the CARES????? It is to encourage people to help out charities and non-profits during this difficult time. The thought is that \$300 may not seem like much, but it could mean a small, struggling non-profit is able to keep the heat, electricity, or water on. If you have made any donations to charities this year, ask your tax advisor to help you add to your refund! If you haven't made a charitable donation yet, I hope you'll consider us. There is a great need everywhere.

CALLING ALL MUSICIANS

On June 19th, TLC will be holding another Fresh Air Concert. It will be a day of fun in the sun with great talent, great food, and great friends while supporting a great cause. We would like to have a variety of artists to fill an afternoon and evening of music. If you belong to a group or know of a group that would be willing to help us raise funds for TLC, please contact us on Facebook, or via email: markng@netins.net.

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One week after our return, Derecho. Out of nowhere, a land hurricane develops and hits our area hard. Just like seven years ago, we were thankful that the barn was spared. Our grain bin that houses Sharron and Bill was also still standing which was a blessing as grain bins did not fair very well around our area. All the work that Jacob and I had accomplished in the spring, however, was erased. We lost so many big trees that we think we are going to have to just make a new trail through the woods and clean as we can. Jacob was devastated. Between the futility of our hard work and the fact that he thinks of every tree and critter on our property as his babies, he spent a month not even able to go out to the site. I kept telling him hard work is never futile and it is also never-ending. What is that saying... Two steps forward and three steps back? That would be the story of Threshold and my life! There's always work to be done, so you might as well embrace it and as Poppy says, "Just start." I reminded him how happy we felt this spring every time we made a patch of the woods look better, and now we had much more of that happiness to look forward to. I also told him that nature will always win through succession. The old trees gone leaves space and sunlight for the young to take over. Also, we will always be planting more trees. It will be alright. I tried to believe me... After many weekends of Mark going out to cut up what he could with the chainsaw, on a nice fall day, Jacob and I finally decided to go out and help. We spent all day hauling, cutting, piling, burning, raking and found our dear Memorial Arboretum under all the debris. We lost only one Memorial tree! At the end of the day, Jacob was talking excitedly about how now he could see how some of the younger trees are going to benefit from the removal of the big trees. He's been out there every weekend since.

Fall was very quiet at Threshold. Schools couldn't visit, our three weddings were cancelled or postponed, no Fall Festival, Hipcampers tapered off with the arrival of colder nights, no knitters, and no after-school Kids Club. Around \$3200 in revenue lost. The only thing I've had to look forward to are our monthly sessions with a homeschool association. I love seeing them every month! Not only because I miss teaching and want something to do, but they are so bright, inquisitive and fun. They are wonderful guinea pigs that we can try some of our curriculum on. Since they come with all ages, we are able to see which programs do well with which age groups, length of program, etc. It's easy to come up with programs on paper, it's a whole other thing to try them with a group. It's been a learning experience for both of us! They have been very understanding and flexible with us, which we really appreciate.

In the new year, I am hoping that we can start the after-school kids again. We haven't met since February and I miss them! Usually, the Christmas session is my favorite: making gifts, caroling at the care center, raising money and shopping for the Angel Tree project. Yesterday, thanks to donations that came in, I was able to shop and fulfill 8 Angel Tree gift requests in the Kids Club's name. It was nice to shop without all the noise and anxiety of my "little helpers", but it wasn't as joyful. We'd like to start building our indoor treehouse, so hopefully "normal" is just around the corner. As for other 2021 goals, we are basically right where we were this time last year:

- 1.) Increase the number of school groups (my #1)
- 2.) Finish getting the donor boards up on the upper level walls! The boards are done, we just need helpers in putting them up.
- 3.) Hold a successful fundraiser so that we can finish/purchase some of the things on our Wish List, not just to stay afloat.
- 4.) We REALLY need to get more rock for the driveway.
- 5.) Get more Board Members and Volunteers. I could use some new ideas and definitely could use more help!
- 6.) Finish the small classroom and the ceiling in the barn hallway.

**We couldn't have made it this far without all of you!
I hope you have a wonderful Holiday Season & a Blessed 2021!**

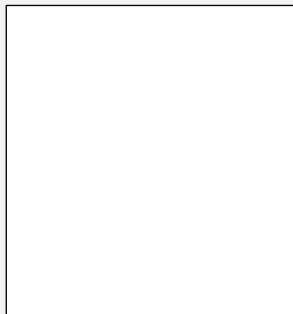
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We need more
Board Members!
If you would like
to help our cause,
join us at our Annual meeting
February 2nd, 4pm
@ the TLC barn.



The *Along The Way...* newsletter is published as a service to supporters & as a record of the achievements of the Threshold Learning Center Board of Directors

UPCOMING EVENTS

ANNUAL MEETING

February 7 *4pm*

If you enjoy TLC and would like to help us move forward in our mission, please join us at 4:00 in the barn. We will review 2020, confirm goals for 2021, and discuss next year's concert fundraiser.

FRESH AIR CONCERT

June 19 *1:00-10:00pm*

Put the date on your calendars now! We will be having our 3rd Annual Fresh Air concert on the official 1st Day of Summer. If you would like to recommend a band or act, please contact us!

*Become a "Friend" on Facebook –
It's the best way to keep up-to-date with
pictures and upcoming events!*