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FMU's Center for the Child to Open Nature Trail

FLORENCE - Lisa Pike is a busy mom. As a member of the Biology Department and Biology Club, she has found a way to combine her knowledge about biology and nature with the children at Francis Marion University's Gail and Terry Richardson Center for the Child. Pike's three-year-old daughter, Lucie, has been enrolled at the center since it opened in August 2008.

When Bunchie Roberts, the director of the center, indicated that she desired to have a nature trail with raised garden beds at the facility for the children to enjoy, Pike wanted to contribute.

According to Pike, "Children spend 44 hours each week in front of a computer or television and less time outdoors. Even if they are outside, it is in a very structured playground, without much room for imaginative play."

After learning about journalist Richard Louv's theory on nature deficit disorder, Pike said she was inspired to do more for the center. According to Louv, there is a lack of creative outdoor play.

Pike said, "This is a part of the problem of increasing obesity, diabetes in young kids, depression, ADHD, and hyperactivity."

To provide the children at the center with a nature trail, Pike secured funding from FMU's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) program. In January, volunteers from FMU's Biology Club began work on the trail behind the center as well as a patch for a garden that the three- and four-year-olds will use. The garden area includes raised beds, scented flower paths, a large sandbox and a nature trail.

Pike said the flowers in the garden will attract a variety of birds the children will study at the center. In fact, the trail is lined with birdhouses and there are even birdfeeders outside the windows of the classrooms. The three- and four-year-olds will have designated flower gardens where they will plant their own flowers.

"We plan to complete the trail and have the garden planted by spring. That's our goal," Pike said excitedly.

In the future, they may even have a compost bin where the children can add their leftover food scraps. There's one thing for sure, children who attend the center will be less likely to have nature deficit disorder and will have a better understanding of the environment around them.

The center is unique when it comes to educating young children. Every teacher has a four-year degree with advising teachers who hold doctorate degrees. The center also provides basic pediatric checkups for the children. The center is open year round from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m.

If you any questions about the Center for the Child or would like to enroll your child, visit their website at www.centerforthechild.org or contact Roberts at (843) 661-1630.

#77/2-19-10

By Mallery Allen

FMU Student (English Major – Professional Writing Program)

Last Published: February 22, 2010 10:50 AM
