Cerena, Earthplace resident since 2005

Earthplace

Where Science, Conservation, and Education Meet
As we breathe in the fresh spring air, the reward reminds us of how far we’ve come this past year. Looking back, we are so very grateful for the precautions staff and families took to ensure our good health, and for the outpouring of community support. There were financial concerns and hardship, but our pain from downsizing of programs and mission delivery was offset by the generosity of many. The number of Earthplace outdoor visitors and donors reached all-time highs in a year when nature was on full display.

In 2020, there was also ample time for reflection. Time to define what we believe and to determine how those beliefs will shape future actions.

- **We believe** our nature sanctuary should be shared, especially with those who don’t get the chance to venture into the woods.
- **We believe** time in nature is time well spent and that running through the woods, lying on a grassy knoll, or crossing a stream in bare feet are equally refreshing.
- **We believe** that discovering nature can be personal, even private. It’s a moment that dwells within us. It’s a comfort zone you can trust and revisit.
- **We believe** that science and discovery are linked. Both lead to understanding the natural world, and a desire to explore it further.
- **We believe** that once you are comfortable in nature, you will protect it for the rest of your life.
- **We believe** that preserving and protecting local waterways and natural ecosystems is like defending your home.
- **We believe** that our planet needs our protection, and together we can learn what must be done in our community, in our world, and throughout our lives.

In 2021, it’s time to act on these beliefs.

Join us outside, share your ideas, or support our inspired nature and animal care staff by becoming a member of Earthplace.

**See you on the trails,**

Tony McDowell

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Pilot Program Enables Earthplace to Bring the Magic of Science to Norwalk & Bridgeport Students

Thanks to the generous support from a private foundation, we are expanding our nature and science programming to under-served communities.

In partnership with ACCESS Educational Services, we are now able to connect with students in nearby towns and launch exciting pilot programs with third grade classes at Brookside Elementary in Norwalk and Wilbur Cross Elementary in Bridgeport. Each student in the classrooms will receive six different science boxes developed by our Nature Programs team. Topics include plants, birds, pollution, and ecosystems.

Each week a member of our Nature Programs team will lead an activity-based lesson relating to one of the science boxes. At the conclusion of the six-week session, the students will enjoy a field trip to Earthplace!

I am super excited about this program for two reasons. First, it is allowing us to reach communities we have not reached before. Second, the programs last for seven weeks, increasing the positive impact on the students with multiple interactions.

Becky Newman,
Director of Nature Programs

Science boxes waiting to be picked up and delivered to the schools

Earthplace Preschool Sees Record Enrollment

The nature-based preschool movement in the United States began in 1967 and the Earthplace Preschool was at the forefront. Now, more than ever, families are seeking early learning programs for their children that provide both nature-based learning experiences and unstructured play outdoors.

Our teachers venture out on our two and a half miles of trails where their students climb, jump, hike, and explore. Their sense of wonder grows when they find a plant growing in an unexpected place or hear the sound of frogs.

The type of play that occurs in nature is more creative and cooperative. Our preschoolers enjoy dramatic play and spending time in the nine nature discovery play zones on the property that include Goldenrod Meadow, the climbing trees, and Frog Hollow Pond. It is our sincere hope that these early childhood experiences will foster a lifelong love of nature.
We are delighted to announce that Harbor Watch has been awarded a $20,000 grant from a donor advised fund at Fairfield County’s Community Foundation!

With this funding, we will be able to grow our COVID-safe “hybrid” education programs, focusing on students in Bridgeport high schools.

Building on the successful pilot of our Virtual River Research Program this past fall, we are rolling out a program expansion with a focus on water quality in Bridgeport’s rivers and nearshore waters.

The first of these programs launches this spring, followed by additional sessions in the summer and fall of 2021.

Donor Advised Funds at Fairfield County’s Community Foundation connect generous local philanthropists with impactful non-profits (both local and national) that align with their interests. This support helps us dramatically expand our programming and impact.

As a new nonprofit partner of Earthplace, the mission of Sustainable Westport remains the same: to help transform Westport into a more sustainable place to live, work, and enjoy. They will continue to educate, inspire, and empower Westport residents, businesses, schools, and the Town to adopt sustainable practices consistent with our shared goal of becoming a Net Zero community by the year 2050, or sooner.

There are many great initiatives in the works, but here’s one you can join right now: The Zero Food Waste Challenge. Join us as we learn how to reduce food waste and recycle food scraps so they can be turned into compost and returned to the soil. You can start today by purchasing compost kits from Earthplace. Importantly, your actions will result in cleaner air and water, and more fertile and resilient soil. Become a zero food waste hero today!

Learn more by clicking “Take Action” on their new website, sustainablewestport.org.
It’s Baby Animal Season!

A message from our Naturalist

Every spring, wildlife rehabilitators get overrun with orphaned animals, including some that aren’t even truly orphans!

Here are a few things to know:

• Deer and rabbits are odorless when they’re born and mom doesn’t go near them except to feed, which may only be twice per day!

• Fawns camouflage and wait for mom to come back. The only time a fawn may need help is if they’re walking around, seemingly lost, and calling for their mother. Then it’s time to call a wildlife rehabilitator!

• If you find a rabbit nest in your lawn, field, or herb gardens, let it be. If you’re unsure whether or not mama rabbit is still around, lay string or yarn over the nest in a tic-tac-toe pattern and check the next day to see if it was disturbed.

Do not attempt to care for an orphaned animal yourself. Wildlife rehabilitators have the training necessary to help an orphaned animal and most rehabilitators will try to unite the orphan with its mother if possible.

Do not attempt to feed or give water to the animal. Wait until after you receive instructions from a licensed wildlife rehabilitator. You can seriously injure or kill an animal if you do otherwise.

Raptors, such as owls or hawks, should not be handled without gloves and proper training. Their talons are sharp! Rabies vector species, such as raccoons, skunks, and foxes, should also not be handled directly.

When contacting a wildlife rehabilitator:

• Be patient. Not all rehabbers can answer every call immediately. Leave a message.

• Be kind. Baby season is overwhelming, and the majority of rehabbers are volunteers. If you can, give a donation along with the animal.

• Be helpful. Most rehabbers will ask you to bring the animal to them. Transporting the animal to them saves time while they care for other animals in their care.

Ways to minimize orphaned animals:

• Save tree work for the fall. Raccoons, birds, and squirrels often raise their young in trees. You won’t always be able to tell if someone is living in the tree!

• Drive the speed limit and keep your eyes peeled for animals. Mothers are often out and about looking for extra calories. Even foxes and raccoons may be seen during the day.

• Keep cats safe indoors and to prevent them from harming wildlife. You can keep cats amused with toys and scratching posts.

• Keep dogs on a leash when outdoors. Dogs are curious, and even if they don’t mean to disturb that rabbit nest, they will.

• We’re so fortunate to share this world with so many other fascinating creatures. It’s easy to live alongside them if we’re careful and smart with our choices.

To find a wildlife rehabber visit our website: earthplace.org/visit/faqs

Earthplace is a true wildlife sanctuary where you may spot Red Tailed Hawks, Barred Owls, Turkey Vultures, Bluebirds, and many other species of birds, as well as other wildlife. Take a walk on our trails and you may be lucky to see—or hear—a Pileated Woodpecker and, if you look closely, you may find holes left by the birds in the pines by the Picnic Grove.

BACKYARD TIPS: Pileated Woodpeckers sometimes visit backyard bird feeders, and they are especially fond of suet. If you have dead or dying trees on your property, a safe distance from your house, consider leaving them alone as they may attract Pileated Woodpeckers looking to forage or nest. Want to attract a breeding pair? Make sure you put up a nest box well before breeding season in the spring. Don’t forget to attach a guard to keep predators from raiding eggs and young.

FUN FACT: The Pileated Woodpecker digs holes in trees to find ants (see photo). Their feeding excavations are often extensive and offer crucial shelter to many species including swifts, owls, ducks, bats, and Pine Martens.

To find out more about which food is preferred by the Pileated Woodpecker, go to Project Feeder Watch (feederwatch.org) and look for the Common Feeder Birds bird list.
A Call for Memberships

Our town is fortunate to have a nature center, and community support is what makes it possible.

With an Earthplace membership you receive all kinds of exciting benefits and you support our mission to build a passion and respect for the natural world.

It’s a win-win.

Contact us for more information:

• Visit: earthplace.org/get-involved/become-member
• Call: 203.557.4400
• Email: members@earthplace.org

Save the Date!

Woodside Bash & Earthplace Fall Festival
October 2 & 3, 2021