

True to nature

Petit Preserve a resource for learners young and old

By Amy Puckett McGee
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It is a rare thing in the modern age — a tract of "unspoiled" woodlands with a crystal clear lake.

It's home to more than 30 species of animals and 30 species of plants, including the endangered pink ladyshipper orchid and the even rarer yellow.

At the border of two ecosystems, it has a rare mix of animal, vegetable and mineral, some not found to the north of the site, some not found to the south. Rarer still, this Bartow County wilderness is protected, safe from development and available for study by scholars young and old.

Cartersville resident Gay Dellinger and her children donated the 66 acres of forest, streams and lush ecosystems which became the "Margaret and Luke Petit Environmental Preserve," named after Ms. Dellinger's parents, "self-taught naturalists and lifelong learners."

The Preserve, a private, 501C3 nonprofit corporation, seeks to provide a nature preserve for environmental studies and research, to provide a safe haven for endan-

year. Currently adults — faculty and

students from North Metro Technical College, Kennesaw State University and Floyd College — have been able to do research at the preserve, but facilities are not yet in place to accommodate groups of younger students. It is the immediate goal of the preserve to construct an environmentally-sensitive "outdoor classroom" for the children.

"Children need shelter. They need bathrooms, a warm place. They need to be able to sit down at tables," said Ms. Dellinger. "We're starting the new year with this building as a priority."

Ms. Dellinger said the outdoor classroom is estimated to cost \$150,000 and will be funded primarily through donations.

"We have approximately half that amount," she said.

Ms. Dellinger said both school systems were enthusiastic about the preserve and its resources. Bartow County School Board member Tammy Livngood and Cartersville School Board President Linda Benton are both preserve board members.

"Both superintendents have been to tour [the site] and were very impressed and supportive," said Ms. Benton. "I hope teachers and students will have field trips out here, and I hope the preserve will be used daily for



Above: Dr. Ed Bostick, preserve board member and professor of biology at Kennesaw State University, explains some plant life to Will Barrett, 12; Emily Barbauti, 7, and Julia Barrett, 15. Below: Preserve board member Gay Dellinger checks out a birdhouse by the lake.

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different age groups."

The wonderful thing about environment-based and environmental education, Ms. Dellinger said, is that it is multidisciplinary. Students can use the environmental preserve as a resource for studies across the curriculum, from science and math to history and art.

Ms. Dellinger said every recognized environmental education program is linked with the Quality Core Curriculum standards.

"They have done scientific studies that show children learn better out of doors," Ms. Dellinger said. "I don't care if you're learning poetry or quantum physics."

In fact, Ms. Dellinger said the board would like to involve students in every phase of the new building's construction, using their math and science skills to measure boards and study architecture.

Ms. Dellinger clarified one point about environmental education: it does not come with a political agenda. Mainstream environmental education, Ms. Dellinger said, is about education, not about advocacy.

"We want to

teach students not what to think,

but how to think," Ms. Dellinger said. "Dogma of any kind is not what education is about."

Ms. Dellinger added the business and industrial communities in Bartow County are also supportive of the preserve's goals.

"Everyone is at the table," she said.

The important thing, Ms. Dellinger said, is that the people of Bartow County take ownership of the preserve and its mission.

"We are grateful for donations, large and small," Ms. Dellinger said, adding there are three ways the community can help with the effort.

One, of course, is with financial donations, which are tax deductible and can be mailed to the preserve at P.O. Box 2843, Cartersville, GA 30120.

A second way groups and organizations can help is to call any board member with their ideas and suggestions about in-kind donations of effort.

Finally, a third way is to be aware of upcoming work days and volunteer opportunities at the site. Information about the preserve will be available at its Web site, www.petitpreserve.com, or contact board president Scott Panter at (770) 387-8312.



gered species and other wildlife and to provide an outdoor teaching center of educational and scientific value.

It is the outdoor teaching center which is most on the hearts and minds of the board members this