

Look What Popped Up at Lenoir Preserve!



A boy playing with a recycled tire



Above: Pup-Up Adventure Playground participants; and below: these girls built their own robot



A girl decorating a window on a self-made playhouse



Boys building a car

Sarah Lawrence College's (SLC) Pop-Up Adventure Playground seemed like the perfect way to draw community awareness for the new bird and dragonfly pond, built this summer by Groundwork Hudson Valley's Green Team at Lenoir Nature Preserve in Yonkers. And it certainly was!

On the crisp, sunny afternoon of October 20, more than 200 children and parents descended upon Lenoir, ready to let their imaginations run wild. Using found materials like cardboard boxes, string, bubble-wrap and fabric, they built cars, robots and elaborately furnished houses. When they came up for air, they ran around and explored the park, now peppered with colorful autumn leaves.

Many parents were surprised to learn that this pristine 40-acre County Park is right in their midst, with hiking trails, a butterfly garden, nature center and, now, a habitat with observation deck for watching birds and dragonflies.

"This is my first time here," said Sandra Cruz, who lives nearby in Yonkers. "My sister heard about this thing happening here today and said 'Let's go!' And the kids are loving it!"

SLC's Child Development Institute (CDI) brought three vans full of materials for unstructured free play for this Pop-Up Playground event, one of several they have hosted in the Yonkers area over the past five years.

"We are delighted to provide adventure play experiences like this, where children can express their creativity and test out new ideas using recyclable materials from their own communities," said CDI Director Indhira Blackwood. "When children are engaging in self-directed play, as they are here today, they are also taking initiative, exploring and developing their collaboration and problem-solving skills while having fun."

Yonkers City Council President Chuck Lesnick helped make the day a success, arranging for bus transportation and getting word out through the schools and the community.

"Groundwork's new bird and dragonfly habitat adds value to the beautiful Lenoir Preserve," Lesnick said, "Having two hundred children use the space turns this natural resource into a wonderful park."

Groundwork Development Director Holly Malekian said, "Watching all of these children building and drawing and collaborating so enthusiastically was truly inspiring. Hats off to the crew from Sarah Lawrence's Child Development Institute for bringing the fun and to AnnaMarie Sollozzo, supervisor of Transportation for Yonkers Public Schools, for bringing the kids. She volunteered to drive the bus, donated for the day by Academy Bus Company."

Lisa Bekey of Yonkers Public Schools and Mayor Mike Spano's office also spread the word about the event. Daniela Ciatto, curator of Lenoir Preserve, helped coordinate the arrangements.

The new Lenoir exhibit, which includes a pond with an observation deck and bird "blind," was built this summer by the Green Team, Yonkers high school students employed by Groundwork to do community sustainability projects. Native shrubs that will attract birds and dragonflies were recently planted by a group of Groundwork youth and staff, as well.

Groundwork recruited an advisory panel of Yonkers citizens to help plan the project to meet the needs of the community and attract new visitors to Lenoir. It was funded through grants from Together Green, Hudson River Audubon and the Westchester County Parks department.