

## EXTENSION SNAPSHOT

Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell Unit



COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURAL CONSUMER &  
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*Master Naturalist Jenny Beal leads a team of volunteers, including Dennis Johnson (pictured) and partners to coordinate the annual Science Adventure Day for Canton fourth graders. The event is held at Lakeland Park with a goal of engaging the students in a variety of hands-on, outdoor activities.*

## Science Adventure Day Helps Draw Kids Outdoors in Canton

Since 2014, University of Illinois Extension Master Naturalists serving in Fulton, Mason, Peoria, and Tazewell counties have collaborated with several partners for a special event called Science Adventure Day. Over a two-day period in September, all Canton District 66 fourth graders experience six separate hands-on sessions and the natural beauty at Lakeland Park.

“I usually stay inside and play on my tablet,” mentioned fourth-grader Hunter during lunch at Science Adventure Day. Comments like this are one of the driving forces behind Master Naturalist Jenny Beal. Beal launched Science Adventure Day in 2014 and has continued to lead the team of collaborators whose goal is to engage youth in a variety of hands-on, outdoor activities.

“My grandmother had a great love of outdoor adventures, which she passed on to her children and grandchildren,” explained Beal. “I went on many adventures with my family. I fell in love with science and nature because of my childhood experiences, and I chose a career as a middle school science teacher.”

While teaching Jr. High, Beal worked with nine other teachers to develop a multidisciplinary unit for outdoor education called Outward Ingersoll, a three-day environmental learning adventure that continues 20 years later. After retiring from full-time teaching, Beal connected with the Master Naturalist program. “My experience with planning and organizing Outward Ingersoll was the blueprint for creating Science Adventure Day at Lakeland Park in Canton.”

Partnering with Canton school and park districts, Beal and her team have provided this program to more than 650 youth over the past five years. “Lakeland Park was the obvious choice to hold Adventure Day because of its history and natural resources. It is always a surprise to me that a number of students have never been to Lakeland. This provides an opportunity to share the natural beauty there with the hope that the student will return with their family.” The day’s sessions include Monarch butterflies, art and science journaling, predator and prey, aquatic life, and Illinois mammals, in addition to exploring the park and Veterans Memorial.

“I am always delighted, though not surprised, when I encounter a parent who tells me how their child couldn’t stop talking about everything they experienced at Science Adventure Day,” explained Jenny. “Long term learning takes place

when there is an emotional attachment. Adventure Day provides that emotional ‘hook’ for students to hang this new learning experience on.”



What makes this program exponentially more successful is the fact that Beal includes the teachers in the planning. The teachers use pre and post-event activities to expand and solidify the student learning.

Photo by Anita Wilkinson, U of I Extension