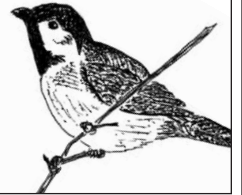


Fiddleheads and Feathers



The Newsletter of the Melinda Gray Ardia Environmental Foundation, Ltd.

Fall 2005

Honoring Melinda *with a grant to Kenya*

Before Melinda began teaching at Newark Middle School, she served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Kenya and Fiji. Melinda taught science in public schools and served as a mentor in both countries. This experience was a culmination of her desire to serve and a major formative influence in her development as an educator and environmentalist. In 2005, MGAEF was able to honor Melinda's Peace Corps service by awarding a grant to support agroforestry and education in Kenya.

Through the generous assistance of the International Center for Research in Agroforestry, we received 12 proposals from across Kenya requesting our support. We were sad to have to choose only one to fund, but through much deliberation, we chose to support the "Trees of Life" project at Ginomoi Youth Polytechnic, run by Mr. Joel Ayab Amagoye. Our funds will go directly to purchase materials for the school to use in their effort to develop an agroforestry nursery. The students will learn how to develop, build, and maintain a functioning tree nursery. After seedlings are large enough to transplant, the school nursery will provide the seedlings to local farmers. These trees will provide fruit, shade, fodder for livestock, and timber, as well as control soil erosion. In many rural locations across Africa, trees are lost at a rapid rate as populations increase and people cut trees for firewood. By providing useful trees, the school hopes to combat the rapid deforestation.

We are overjoyed to be able to support a project that not only provides tangible educational benefits and skills, but also helps fight a critical envi-



Kenyan students prepare to transplant seedlings to local farmers.

ronmental concern. The fact that we can give something back to a country that meant so much to Melinda makes this grant especially sweet. You can see more pictures of the project on the MGAEF website, www.mgaef.org.

"One of My Best Learning Experiences"

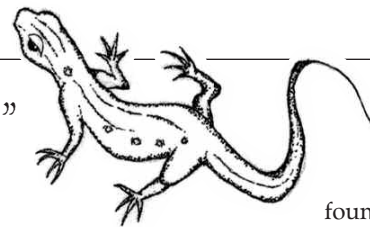
Last summer, MGAEF sponsored two Clarence High School students to attend the SUNY ESF Adirondack Field Studies Program. Ironically, the students chosen happened to be third cousins, Andrea Spoth and Jeff Spoth. After spending the week at Cranberry Lake, Andrea said that this "turned out to be perhaps one of my best learning experiences. Instead of reading about ecology, I was able to experience it in the most ideal location, The Adirondacks."

Andrea and Jeff both sent letters to the MGAEF describing all they had learned. Common to both of their experiences were:

- Intensive academic work
- Working in groups
- Isolation from civilization
- Scientific methods and experiments
- Increasing confidence, and
- Making new friends from diverse backgrounds.



Andrea, center, and Jeff, right, pictured with other students at Cranberry Lake.



Andrea found that "the instructor's enthusiasm and knowledge were contagious. We caught amphibians first in swampy lowland and then on high ground. There was a difference between frequencies of certain species in the varying locations. I can confidently say that this was the first time I have held a red backed salamander!"

Jeff described a typical day: "Every day we were separated into two groups of about 25 people. We learned about different types of conifers and the population of different rodents and amphibians (salamanders). We also measured the population of trees

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A Look at Board Member Glenn Huels



Glenn Huels, a Certified Public Accountant and MBA, has been on the Foundation's Board of Directors and Finance Committee since 1997. A Buffalo native, he obtained his BS in Business Administration from SUNY Buffalo and his MBA from the Rochester Institute of Technology. Currently the president and sole shareholder of his own company, Schadowrider Ltd. (recording and producing CDs, along with developing a small wellness retreat center), his prior professional experience included Tax Manager in the Buffalo office of the international public accounting firm of Deloitte & Touche, Corporate Tax Director at Goulds Pumps, Inc. in Seneca Falls, and Vice President – Tax at Bausch & Lomb in Rochester.

Glenn has served on the boards of directors of various non-profit organizations, including: director, president, vice president,

treasurer and secretary of the Rochester Chapter of the Tax Executives Institute; director of the Rochester Folk Art Guild; elected member of the Seneca Falls Central School District Board of Education; president and director of the Child Development and Parent Resource Center in Seneca Falls; president and director of the United Way of Seneca County; treasurer and director of the Seneca County Chapter of the American Red Cross; and a trustee of Women's Equality Day, Inc.

Currently feeling blessed to be living on 55 acres in the hills of the Finger Lakes region town of Middlesex with his wife Kriss, Glenn has a daughter, Aly, in her second year at Houghton college, and two older married sons, Chris and Sean, living in New Jersey and Buffalo, respectively. He says he has too many interests to keep up with – to name but a handful of them: photography, playing and listening to music (one of his favorite artists was also one of Melinda's favorites: Canadian singer-song-writer Bruce Cockburn), horses, hiking, working outdoors, weaving, yoga, and reading.

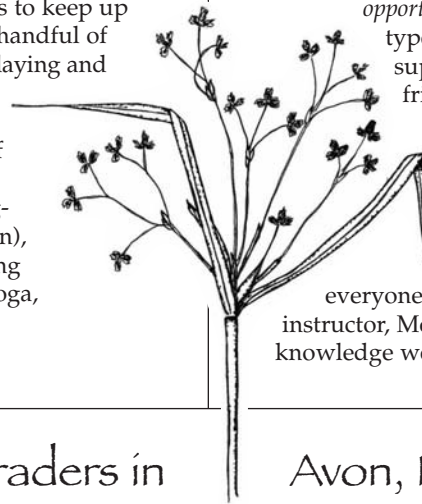
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and density of the woods. We would finish our work group work around 6:00 pm and we could hang out with each other until 9:00 pm."

Each student with a partner had a final project due the last day of camp. Andrea tested the hypothesis that tree species favor different amounts of moisture, and Jeff focused on the rodent populations on the islands of Cranberry Lake.

After a week in the woods, Jeff said "I had a great time at SUNY's College of Environmental Science and Forestry Ranger School and I would go back in a heartbeat. I met so many new people that I am still in contact with. I learned so many things and would recommend taking this trip to anyone."

Andrea concluded that "At Cranberry Lake, I learned how to apply the information from the classroom into the real world. I am very grateful to the Melinda Gray Ardia Foundation for allowing me this opportunity." This is exactly the type of work that Melinda supported. Many of her friends and family remember her joy in the Adirondacks: paddling a canoe, wading through a swamp, exploring new flora and fauna, and sharing her new discoveries with everyone around her. Like Andrea's instructor, Melinda's enthusiasm and knowledge were contagious!



Grant Awarded to Help 6th Graders in

Avon, MA.

The MGAEF awarded our second curriculum grant in 2005 to help 6th graders in Avon, Massachusetts learn how to design and conduct research on wetlands near their school. Ms. Jennifer Ceven of The Ralph Butler Elementary School requested support for her SPLASH! Project. We are excited about being a part of this project because it combines the key components of our mission: (1) integrating outdoor study with classroom instruction and (2) developing critical thinking and scientific thinking in students.

The students will investigate the health of local ponds through a scientific assessment and management study. They will use the Rapid Assessment approach developed by the Massachusetts office of Coastal Zone Management. This approach allows researchers (even 6th graders!) to collect ecological indicators with minimal disturbance to the natural environment. The students will measure water and soil characteristics while also conducting plant surveys and wildlife mapping. One of the strengths of this curriculum is that the students will be using the same methods as professional environmental scientists.

Through the entire process the students will be able to develop their science skills: careful observations and measurements, data analysis and communication. In addition, they will

be able to compare their results over time to see how management of the pond affects soil, plant and wildlife health. Ms. Ceven will strive to help the students see their results in a management context. The best part is that they will work to communicate their results to the community at large.

This project is similar to others we have funded in the past, in part, because water and wetland studies are an excellent introductory habitat for students. This is because wetlands are a habitat under threat due to land clearing for development, pollution and runoff, and changes in climate with global climate change. Our hope as a non-profit organization is to help instill in students both skills for observing and interpreting the world around them, as well as an appreciation for how to assess and manage critical habitats.

Our funds will go to purchase equipment for water and soil sampling and will complement other funds that Ms. Ceven has secured for her work. We are excited to help support a young and creative teacher who embodies many of Melinda's characteristics.





Clarence Nature Center Update

The Clarence Nature Center has had many very important improvements this past year that have greatly enhanced its use as an environmental education teaching facility for the Clarence Schools.

First and foremost – the Nature Center Clubhouse had the very important finishing touches of heating and plumbing added this last year! As the result of the continued outstanding contributions and efforts of the Clarence Rotary Club, and with the assistance of John Burns and his team from the Clarence Parks Department, a complete septic system and leech-bed was built, and “indoor plumbing” was added to the Clubhouse. Two handicapped-access bathrooms were built, and a service sink was installed for laboratory projects. The drilled well was activated and piped into the Clubhouse for year-around service. In addition, a new propane-fired warm air furnace and hot water heater were installed, which allows the Clubhouse to be maintained at a comfortable temperature through the cooler seasons.

The result of the above finishing touches to the Clubhouse is that the Nature Center is now being actively used for regular field trips and Environmental Education classes by the Clarence School System. It is now possible to schedule half-day and longer field trips, because of the new “facilities”. The Clubhouse is set up as a classroom, complete with desks, chairs, and a growing reference library. Jim Marshall, High School Biology Teacher, has been appointed to develop the facility for the School, and is actively coordinating the activities at the Nature Center. The Technology Department has set up a satellite dish for computer access, and computers are installed in the Clubhouse. Field Trips are scheduled by Earth Science and Biology Classes to study Nature and the Environment during the Fall, Winter, and Spring seasons at the Nature Center.

Trail maintenance is being done by the School, by Eagle Scouts, and by other community-service volunteers.

The MGAEF 10th Anniversary celebration on Saturday, May 6, 2006, will give all of our MGAEF Friends and Family the opportunity to see this wonderful facility that has been developed in Clarence.

Remembering Melinda

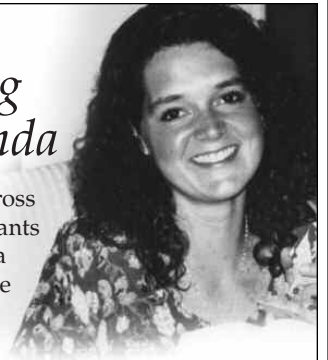
Sometimes in life we cross paths with someone who plants a seed in our heart. Melinda Gray Ardia was one of those people in my life.

I remember Melinda for many things. She was my teacher, my swim coach, my friend. Though I was only in 8th grade when she came into my life, too young to understand the light she shined forth, as I grow I can still look back and learn from her. She inspired me in more ways than I could even begin to put on paper. She inspired with her smile, her love of life and nature, her spirit so full of life. I remember the first day I had her as a teacher thinking to myself, “Wow, my teacher has a nose ring and wears Birkenstock sandals!” In essence I learned from her that it was OK to express myself outside the mainstream. I remember Ziggy the iguana. I remember when she was my swim coach and the fun we had at practice. I learned the importance of sisterly bonds by the picture on her desk of her and her sister and mother.

One day during class a box of powdered milk fell out the window. When she went down to the parking lot to get it, I thought it would be funny to dump water on her head. She was a little mad at first, but her good sense of humor shined through quickly. Sometimes when it rains I wonder if maybe it is her dumping water on my head.

In many ways, Melinda continues to be an inspiration in my life as I grow into adulthood. I am currently pursuing a BS in Biotechnology at the Rochester Institute of Technology. In August I climbed to the summit of Mt. Marcy with my fiancé Aaron. It was exhilarating and extremely difficult, but it was an amazing experience. Last year I was selected to travel to the Caribbean island of Montserrat to participate in ecological research through the Research Integrating Molecular and Environmental Sciences program.

I learned many things from Melinda, yes I even learned some Earth Science, but she had a way of teaching so much more than the curriculum required. Melinda really made a difference in this world even though her life was cut short. I will always remember her. – Nola Hause



Holiday Gift Ideas!

MGAEF Wildlife Notecards – A perfect holiday gift, each 12 notecard set features 6 different color photos of African animals taken by Melinda while in Kenya with the Peace Corps. These beautiful cards can be used for any occasion. Cost is \$10.00 per set, plus \$1.00 shipping.

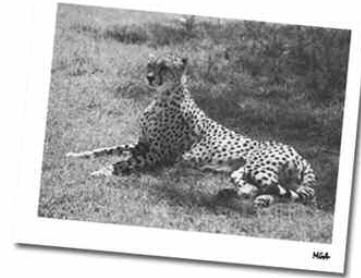
MGAEF Wildlife Shirts – We have limited inventories of t-shirts and sweatshirts decorated with Melinda's wildlife drawings. Our t-shirts are \$10.00 each and sweatshirts are \$20.00 each, including shipping. All are 100% cotton and high quality. For sizes and availability, please email Suzanne at SGMurphy17@aol.com to confirm we have the sizes you want, then send in your order on the enclosed form.

Gift "In Honor or Memory Of" – A meaningful way to honor or remember a special person! Make a contribution in their name to MGAEF, where your gift will advance environmental education, and we will send an acknowledgment letter to the honoree or family. Perfect for holidays, birthdays, and remembrance. Please indicate honoree or family name and address so we can send them an acknowledgment letter.

Thank You For Your Support

We depend on your support to provide these programs in the future. Your donation goes directly toward educational programs: our operating costs are minimal (<0.5% of annual budget) because we maintain no offices and all administration is done through volunteer board members. All contributions are tax-deductible.

If you are able, please help us reach more students locally and around the world by sending your check to "MGAEF" in the enclosed gift envelope. We are ever grateful for your support.



Join us to Celebrate the MGAEF's 10th Anniversary!

Saturday

May 6th, 2006

2:00-6:00 pm

10th Anniversary Celebration

Clarence Nature Center

9050 Sheridan Drive, Clarence NY

Student-led nature hikes, environmental slide shows, great food, live music, games and art for the kids, and lots of fun in true Melinda style.

We hope to see you there!

